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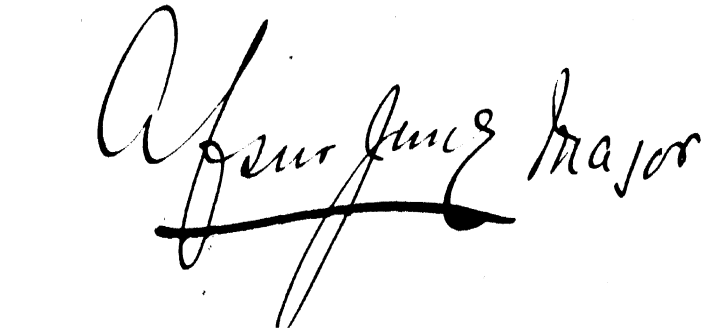
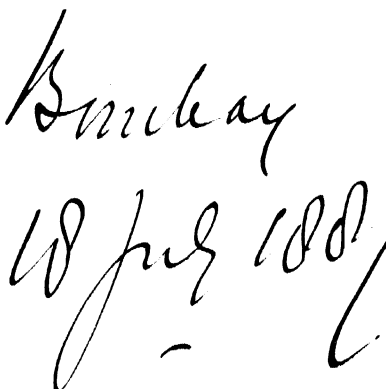
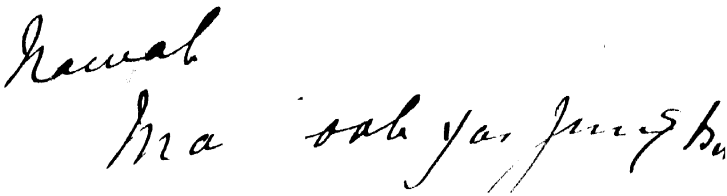




FROM PEKIN TO CALAIS

BY LAND.

LONDON
PRINTED BY GILBERT AND RIVINGTON, LIMITED,
ST. JOHN'S HOUSE, CLERKENWELL ROAD.



OUR CARAVAN (GOBI DESERT).—DAWN.

FROM PEKIN TO CALAIS BY LAND

BY

H. DE WINDT.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAP.

"Plus Je vis l'étranger, plus J'aimai ma patrie.'—*De Belloy.*

LONDON—CHAPMAN AND HALL,

LIMITED.

1889.

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TO

THE RAJA OF SARAWAK, G.C.M.G.,

IN REMEMBRANCE OF MANY

PLEASANT HOURS OF TRAVEL SPENT IN HIS

DOMINIONS IN THE ISLAND OF BORNEO.

PREFACE.

THERE are two Englishmen at present living in Shanghai who have travelled overland from Europe to China. I was told, when there, that these gentlemen are continually receiving letters from England asking for information relative to the journey from Petersburg to Pekin and *vice versâ*, and in the Gobi Desert and Siberia.

It is mainly owing to this circumstance that I publish these pages, for I fear the general reader will find little to interest him in this record of our monotonous pilgrimage through Europe and Asia. I feel that an apology is needed for its publication, and need hardly say that it does not aspire to the title of a book of travel, being merely a record of my impressions in the less civilized parts of China, and in that weird and melancholy country, more perhaps from associations than aspect, Siberia.

The voyage is, though somewhat original, sadly devoid of interest. Urga and Irkoutsk are, no doubt, well worth seeing, but a passing glimpse of these unique cities far from repays the discomfort, not to say hardship, which must be undergone on the caravan route.

I can only trust this book may deter others from following my example, and shall then have some satisfaction in knowing that its pages have not been written in vain.

M. Victor Meignan concludes his amusing work "De Paris à Pekin par terre," thus :—

"N'allez pas là ! C'est la morale de ce livre ! "

Let the reader benefit by our experience.

H. DE W.

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FROM PEKIN TO CALAIS BY LAND.

CHAPTER I.

GRAVESEND TO PEKIN.

"FROM China to France overland! Why, surely it's impossible. I thought one could only get to China by sea!"

Such was the remark made by a young lady whom I had the honour of taking down to dinner a few days previous to embarking upon the voyage of which I am about to narrate my experiences. Although I trust there are not many educated persons who, like my fair friend, are unaware that Pekin and Paris are actually undivided by sea, I imagine there are but few who, if put down at Calais, and told to find their way overland to Pekin, would know how to set about it, fewer still who have any practical knowledge of that vast but comparatively unknown country separating the Chinese Empire from Russia proper, Siberia.

It had been a long-projected voyage. Lancaster, (a fellow-traveller in many lands,) and I had talked it over for at least two years before: in the early spring of 1887, we finally decided to put our project into execution, and start for the great unknown.

Unlike most voyages which in these days of travel are an accomplished fact as soon as decided upon, this one was fraught with innumerable delays and annoyances. Our difficulties commenced at the very outset, for nowhere in London, or indeed anywhere else, could I glean the smallest information respecting the journey; the only book I succeeded in finding on the subject being one written by John Bell, the English traveller, in 1788, but, as may be imagined, the information contained therein was somewhat obsolete.

Nothing more modern, however, could I procure. Jules Verne's amusing and clever book, "Michel Strogoff," deals largely with Irkoutsk, Lake Baikal, and other regions we were about to traverse, but I hardly felt justified in taking that versatile author as a travelling-guide. That we landed at Tientsin—China—and saw the sea again at Calais—France—was all we definitely knew; of

the time it took to do, or how the journey was to be accomplished, we were quite in the dark.

About a week before our departure, however, I had the good fortune to meet a gentleman connected with the Russian Embassy in London, and to him I confided our difficulties. M. de —— was indeed a friend in need, for in less than twenty-four hours our difficulties had vanished like snow in the sunshine. Not only was the route from Pekin to Moscow clearly laid down for us, but we were provided, in addition, with a letter of introduction from M. de Staal, the Russian Ambassador in London, to the Russian Minister at Pekin. Had it not been for this, I doubt whether we should ever have got further than the celestial city.

The route (we now found) was as follows: From Shanghai to Pekin by steamer and house-boat, from Pekin to Kalgan (or the Great Wall of China) by mule litter, and thence across the Great Gobi Desert to Kiakhta, the Russo-Chinese frontier, by camel caravan. From Kiakhta to Tomsk, *via* Lake Baikal, Irkoutsk, and Krasnoiarsk by tarantass or Russian post carriage, and thence by steam communication on the Obi and Irtish rivers to Tobolsk and Tiumen. From the latter place our

journey was easy enough. Four days' sail and seven of steam would bring us to Moscow, practically the end of our voyage. As to the time the journey would take, no one, even at the Russian Embassy, seemed to know. So much in this journey depends (as we afterwards found) upon the weather, the facility of obtaining camels at the Great Wall, and last, but not least, the state of the roads in Siberia. We were starting at a good time, however, and with luck might expect to reach Moscow in the early autumn. If detained in Siberia by floods or other casualties, we might not arrive in Europe till the new year. This was all we could ascertain, and with this somewhat scanty information were forced to be content.

The outfit question did not trouble us much. A Terai hat, two or three tweed suits, and an unlimited supply of cigars and tobacco met our requirements. Everything we took went comfortably into two small-sized leather portmanteaus. A rifle, fowling-piece and brace of double-barrelled pistols (not revolvers) were also taken, and this completed our wardrobe and armoury. I often wonder what the West End outfitters would do were it not for the yearly increasing number of Globe-Trotters.

Be it understood I mean Globe-Trotters, not travellers, for there is a vast difference between the two. I have often been amused at the utterly useless articles forced upon the unhappy G. T. by the Bond Street or Piccadilly haberdasher, who probably knows rather less of the country his customer is about to visit than the Khan of Khiva does of Pall Mall. The Globe-Trotter *pur et simple* is seldom (so far as I have seen) of high intellectual attainments, but one I met a few years ago, while on a voyage to Sydney, eclipsed everything. He had provided himself with enough thick clothes and furs to fit out an expedition to the North Pole. On asking him the reason, he replied, "Oh! we shall get to Sydney at Christmas, you know, and it will be so awfully cold after the tropics!"

Our final preparations completed, we took passage for Shanghai, and the rainy, gusty morning of the 7th of April, 1887, saw us steaming down channel with half a gale of wind in our teeth, looking our last on the white cliffs of England, while to our left was just visible the low-lying coast of France, the goal we hoped to reach in safety, before the following winter, and from which we were separated by the length of Europe and Asia.

I will not inflict a description of the voyage out upon the reader. It would be superfluous in these days of travel, when a man secures his berth for Sydney or Yokohama with much the same indifference as twenty years ago he took a ticket for Rome or Vienna. The life on board a P. and O. ship is familiar to most of us. Suffice it to say that our fellow-passengers were of the usual kind: the Colonial bishop, who buried himself in a deep theological work before we had cleared Land's End, only to emerge from it at Colombo; the Hong Kong merchant and his family living on the usual terms of armed neutrality with the Indian Civil Service official and his wife, an Indian Major-General, a sprinkling of bank clerks and coffee-planters, two or three soldiers rejoining their regiments, and a pretty grass widow, returning to her husband, an Indian Judge. These, with half a dozen more or less uninteresting young ladies "going out to be married," completed our party. The ages of the latter seemed to increase in proportion to the distance they were going. The one whose fortunate fiancé resided at Hong Kong must have been fifty at the very least. I had almost forgotten a nearly perfect specimen of the Globe-Trot-

ter, who joined us, resplendent in purple and fine linen, at Suez; a young gentleman somewhat inclined to take more wine than was good for him, and who was going abroad for the good of his health—presumably also for that of his friends and relations at home.

There is a very false impression existing among those who have never travelled in one, as to the delights of a voyage in a P. and O., and the endless gaiety and amusement on board these floating hotels. I have made at least a dozen voyages by this particular line, and must confess that the gaiety and amusement, if it ever existed, has escaped my observation. Perhaps I have been unfortunate, but I must own that I have invariably found the life on board these ships deplorably dull. The mere fact of being cabined, cribbed, confined, with three score of one's fellow-creatures, the majority of whom have not a thought or feeling in common, is surely sufficient to account for a lack of enjoyment. At the same time, to the casual onlooker, who is wise enough to keep out of them, the petty rows and scandals on board ship are amusing enough. How Major-General Jones has had the audacity to take the seat next the captain at dinner, instead of Commissioner Brown,

who, as everybody ought to know, if they don't always takes precedence of him at Brandypore; and how Mrs. Commissioner Brown has felt compelled to cut Mrs. Major-General Jones in consequence. How the wife of Surgeon Squills, of the Bengal Staff Corps, has forbidden her daughter to speak to the third mate, and that matron's subsequent mortification on discovering that the tabooed officer is the second son of an Earl. How, in our case, one of the future blushing brides (the Hong Kong one) only wished that poor dear Judge could see how his wife went on, although to unbiassed eyes, that cheery little lady's sole crime consisted in being more than pretty, and absurdly good-natured. How the Globe-trotter overcome by (let us say) the heat in the Red Sea offered to fight the captain for a dozen of champagne on his own quarter-deck,—all this could I descant upon at length, but fear lest I weary the reader, forgetting that a good joke at sea is but a sorry jest ashore.

Light and favourable winds favoured us to Malta, that shadeless, bustling rock so happily christened by Byron "The little Military Hot-House." A few hours here allowed of a stroll ashore and a visit to the mess of that cheeriest and best of regiments, the

"Black Watch." Then, after dinner at the club, and a chat over old Cairo-days, off again in the moonlight to the *Bombay*, and, three days later, Port Said. Here an unexpected delay awaited us. The P. and O. S.S. *Rome* had gone ashore (the commencement of a series of disasters for the Company :) which meant a detention of five days, at least, at the glary, unsavoury canal port.

Small-pox was raging in this den of publicans and sinners, and several cases having occurred on the homeward-bound P. and O. ships, we were requested by the captain not to land, if we could possibly help it, during our stay. A prospect of five days cooped up in an atmosphere of coal-dust and sand, to say nothing of the noisome odours off the shore, was anything but inviting, [illegible] o'clock the next evening saw us sitting [illegible] to dinner in the cool, comfortable dining-room of Shepherd's Hotel, Cairo.

There is a charm about Cairo peculiar to itself. Nowhere else do we find that strange mixture of western civilization and eastern barbarism that exists in the Egyptian capital, which seems, by the way, to be yearly increasing in popularity as a winter resort. Everything in the place is original

and therefore charming, and, although surrounded with every European luxury and comfort, so utterly unlike Europe.

A telegram was received during our stay here, announcing the total loss of the P. and O. *Tasmania*, and the drowning, among others, of her captain, poor Perrins, than whom no more popular commander or smarter sailor ever lived. We were continually seeing or hearing of wrecks on our voyage out. Besides passing three lately sunken vessels in the Red Sea, we got news at Colombo of the largest ship in the Nord-Deutscher Lloyd line having gone down off Cape Guardafui; at Shanghai of the sinking of the M.M. Steamer *Menzaleh* between that port and Japan.

We had a favourable passage through that exaggerated bugbear the Red Sea, which, by the way, I have found cooler three times out of four than the Indian Ocean. Aden was not touched at, and a quick run of nine days brought us to Colombo, where we bade adieu to the *Bombay*, which was proceeding to Calcutta, and embarked on board the *Piacenza*, a vessel considerably smaller but as comfortable in every respect as the leviathan we had left.

Twenty-four hours here gave us time for a run

out to Mount Lavinia, where we received a hearty welcome from the jovial German Herr (surrounded, as usual, by a menagerie of domestic pets) who manages that picturesque seaside hostelry. A comfortable dinner in the breezy *salle à manger* in full view of the cool blue sea and yellow sands, coffee and a quiet cigar in the verandah, were a pleasant change from the stuffy saloon of the *Bombay*. Then back again to Colombo in the moonlight, along the palm-fringed road, heavy with the scent of jungle flowers, refreshed inwardly and outwardly, and ready for the long weary days of sea to Shanghai.

We had the *Piacenza* pretty well to ourselves, There were but twenty first-class passengers in all, among them two pretty girls fresh from Devonshire, with the good looks, and clear, fresh complexions that county alone seems able to produce. It seemed a sin so to take them to a clime notorious for stealing the roses from the youngest and fairest faces. In the second class were some ten or twelve Protestant female missionaries bound for North China, whose religious zeal was unparalleled. They were for ever hunting up lost sheep among the passengers, hot as

it was. I do not fancy, however, that their efforts were very successful. Only one of them made converts. She was eighteen, and very good-looking.

The remainder of our voyage was uneventful and tedious enough. Hot, sleepy little Penang; Singapore a vision of green hills and red dust, a sickly odour of pepper, cocoa, nut-oil, and drains. Hong Kong, for all the world like some Spanish or Italian town with its white terraces, and coloured venetians, nestling in masses of dark green foliage at the foot of the bare rugged peak; all these were passed without incident worthy of mention excepting the meeting of the fifty-year-old bride with her fiancé at the latter port, which was affecting in the extreme. It was a relief to find that, at any rate, the bridegroom was something near her own age. Five days later, on the 21st of May, six weeks to a day since leaving Gravesend, we dropped our anchor in the broad, muddy waters of the Yangzekiang, whence a small tug conveyed us in six hours up the narrower and still muddier Woosung river to Shanghai.

Shanghai cannot be called a picturesque place.

Vast alluvial plains of rice and cotton surround it on every side, while the view from the bund or esplanade fronting the river, is not unlike the Thames at Blackwall, with its flat banks, forests of masts, and grey stone wharves and warehouses. The town itself consists of three distinct settlements, English, French, and American, divided one from another by small tributaries of the Woosung river. These settlements, quite distinct from the native Chinese city, were formed by their respective governments in 1846, and occupy a space of ground rather more than a mile square. Shanghai, in 1883, contained a population of four hundred thousand, of whom two thousand were foreign residents, and an idea of its commercial importance may be gained by the fact that its trade in silk, tea, and opium now equals thirty to forty million sterling value of imports and exports.

Were I ever condemned to live in the far East (which Heaven forbid), I should certainly choose Shanghai for a residence, for besides its other advantages, there is a marked absence among its European inhabitants of the ill-nature and scandal that makes anything but a very short stay in other colonial settlements almost intolerable to those

whose occupation does not compel them to reside there. Whether it is the effect of the climate on the liver, I know not, but for envy, hatred, and malice commend me to the European communities of China and the Straits Settlements.

There is a capital club (one of the best if not *the* very best in the East) at Shanghai, of which (thanks to the kindness of Mr. C——, to whom we had an introduction) we were made honorary members, no mean advantage, for the Shanghai hotels are by no means models of comfort or cleanliness. We intended making a stay of at least ten days before going on to Tientsin, the port of Pekin, for many things had to be thought of and procured for the long journey across the Desert of Gobi, which we now ascertained, for the first time, is nearly a thousand miles across.

There seems to be no lack of amusement at Shanghai, and the merchants and other Europeans located there appear to have what Americans would call a "real good time of it" all the year round—so far as regards gaiety and sport. For those who care for it there is any amount of shooting. In winter there is no lack of duck, teal, snipe, and other wild fowl. Indeed from

here all the way up to Pekin the country teems with game, big and small, the former including wild boar and deer, while further north in Manchuria are found lion, tiger, and bear. Nor is shooting the only sport, for there is a capital race-course, polo and cricket ground. I attended a match on the latter, in which was playing, in Chinese dress and a pigtail (!) a lately celebrated English cricketer, well known at Lord's and the Oval, who had adopted the native costume in accordance with the rules of the Mission of which he is now a member. The loose clumsy dress did not seem to interfere with his play much, for he was quite in his old form, and made over a hundred runs first innings.

But the Race week is the real Shanghai carnival. At this festive season offices and warehouses are closed, and everything given up for the business of the meeting. Nearly all the horses engaged are Mongolian ponies, and half the fun of the thing is getting a "hot one" down from its native plains and keeping it dark till the day of its engagement. The figures paid for these little animals are something fabulous. People at home have no idea of how our countrymen live in China. "Light come, light go," seems

to be the motto of the cheery, hospitable Shanghai merchants, who, although they make such enormous fortunes, never seem, to the casual visitor, to have anything to do but entertain the stranger who has the good luck to find himself within their gates. It will be long before I forget the kindness they showed us, although (before we met Mr. C.) we did not know a soul in the place.

It was curious sometimes to cross the iron bridge separating them and take a ramble from the English into the French town. It was like crossing the English Channel—indeed, I doubt if Dover and Calais present a more striking contrast than do the settlements of their respective nations at Shanghai. One left the broad regular roads, asphalte pavements and severe, business-like architecture that the mercantile Briton takes with him wherever he goes, to emerge the other side of the narrow stream on a boulevard, that first thought of every colonizing Frenchman—lined with cafés, gaily striped awnings, and little zinc tables, at which Auguste and Alphonse sat sipping their absinthe or "Mazagran," waited upon by bustling, white-aproned garçons. The sleepy looking Douanier, with baggy trousers and képi, the grass-grown cobbled streets, the dark blue enamelled

plates at the street-corners, with Rue de la Republique, Rue de Paris, &c., thereon in large white letters, the general air of stagnation and idleness among the population, seemed to carry one in a moment over leagues and leagues of land and sea to some quiet provincial town in far-away France. It needed not the tricolor floating from the mainmast of the ironclad anchored midstream, off the Consulate, to tell us that we were no longer on English ground.

The Shanghai bund and esplanade on a fine afternoon was amusing enough, and we whiled away many a pleasant half-hour watching the motley crowd that assemble there for a ride or drive in the cool of the evening. Here might be seen every grade of colonial society, from the solemn and portly merchant and his family rolling solemnly along in an English-built landau, to the San Francisco *demi-mondaine*, all powder and patches, dashing about in a Victoria drawn by a pair of pulling, tearing Mongolian ponies. Europeans in buggies and on horseback, Japanese in rikshaws, Chinese in wheelbarrows (the reader may smile, but this is a public conveyance in Shanghai), crowds of every conceivable nation and colour strolling under the trees by the water's edge, the esplanade at

Shanghai on a fine evening is a sight to see and remember.

At night electric lights every twenty yards or so convert the bund into a perfect fairyland. The inauguration of the Jablokoff system, however, was attended with a slight *contretemps*. Crowds of natives and Europeans turned out the first night to see the effect, but for a good hour none was apparent. The place was wrapped in total darkness, and the expectant crowd beginning to show signs of impatience, it was found that the engineer had fixed the lights *above* the trees, whence the dense foliage very naturally obscured it, instead of under. This trifling mistake was, however, soon rectified, and the brilliant illumination so took the fancy of the natives that all the principal Chinese thoroughfares are now lit by it.

The native city of Shanghai, is walled and separated from the French and English settlements by a deep, muddy moat. Some clumsy iron cannon, said to be the oldest in existence, are mounted upon its dilapidated grass-grown battlements. This was our first experience of a celestial city, and we did not, after visiting it, look forward with unalloyed pleasure to the two

hundred odd miles of country we were about to traverse between Pekin and the Great Wall of China. But I did not then know that Shanghai is renowned as being the dirtiest city in the Chinese Empire, and certainly we never afterwards came across one to equal it in this respect. Pekin itself was a paradise in comparison.

The streets of Shanghai proper are none of them more than ten feet in breadth. Some are even considerably narrower, and the tottering, tumble-down dwellings, the majority built of wood, bend forward on either side until they nearly touch overhead. The thoroughfares are thus always, even on the brightest day, in a state of semi-darkness. The pavements, rough and uneven, are formed of huge stone slabs, some of them, judging by the characters inscribed thereon, many hundreds of years old. Worn away by time and use, many are broken away in parts, revealing underneath the sewage and filth of years, which, slowly rotting away, infects the whole city with a hot, sickly odour of putrefaction. It was a hot, muggy day when we visited it, and the stench from these places was something beyond description. I was not surprised to hear

that cholera and typhus number their victims by thousands at times, and that an epidemic (of some sort or another) always exists.

Yet it seemed a busy, bustling place, and we could scarcely make our way along the sloppy streets for the continuous stream of traffic. It was exactly like a human bee-hive, and we should very soon have lost ourselves without a guide in the crooked, tortuous streets that ran in all directions like a maze, without any regard to regularity or order. We came suddenly in the very heart of the city, upon an oasis in this desert of filth and squalor, a space about a quarter of a mile square. A large circular lake overhung with weeping willows occupied the centre. Great white and yellow lilies lay here and there on the surface of the smooth clear water, in which one could see the gold fish swimming lazily to and fro about the thick green weeds and stems, ten or fifteen feet deep. About fifty yards from the shore, and connected with it by a light bamboo bridge, stood a large pagoda gorgeous in vermilion and gold, with countless little gilt bells hung around the roof, which, with every breath of air gave out a sweet, musical jangle.

Seated in this were a crowd of men and women, talking, laughing, and drinking tea. All were dressed in the richest silks, the men in dark blue or plum colour, the women in lighter shades of green, heliotrope, or orange, their necks and arms loaded with heavy gold ornaments, their quaint, impassive, doll-like faces thickly smeared with paint. On the banks around the lake were booths for the sale of sweetmeats, fans, silks, cigarettes, and jewellery, while jugglers and acrobats plied their trade among the busy crowd, or at the little tables set out by the waterside and occupied by noisy chattering tea-drinkers. I stood for some time watching the curious scene, which was for all the world like a bit broken out of a willow-pattern plate. It seemed so odd to walk suddenly out of the filthy, sewage-laden streets into this hidden corner of cleanliness and picturesque revelry. But China is full of such contradictions. I afterwards discovered that we had strayed into a tea-garden (there are a dozen such in the city) and that the pretty pagoda was used as a kind of private box for the better classes, just as our own smart people at home occasionally patronize the Alhambra

and other music-halls to gaze at a respectful distance on the manners and customs of the "Oi Polloi."

The Chinese, I found, are great believers in the art of fortune-telling. We passed on our way homewards many of the shops, or rather boxes, in which the professors of the art received their subjects. They seemed to have many methods, but the favourite one consists in dipping the thumb into a piece of hot, soft, black wax, and then impressing it firmly upon a piece of parchment or white wood. The lines thus obtained are supposed to predict the future. The professors seemed to be doing a roaring trade. Their fees were not extortionate; a couple of cash (about $\frac{1}{2}d.$) each consultation.

The most important thing we now had to consider was the purchase of stores for our journey over the "Great Hungry Desert," as Gobi is called by the Chinese. It was by no means easy to decide how much or how little to take, for no one in Shanghai seemed to know whether in the eight hundred odd miles lying between the Great Wall of China and Ourga food of any sort or kind was procurable. However, hearing that everything in the

way of provisions was outrageously dear at Tientsin, and unprocurable at Pekin, we decided to lay in our stock at Shanghai, and curiously enough furnished ourselves with exactly the right amount, for our stores failed the very day before we reached Kiakhta. The claret, whisky, and soda-water gave out some time before, but we had plenty of lime-juice, which made the brackish desert water drinkable.

Were I to do this journey again, I should certainly send everything of this kind straight out from England, for the camp furniture, saddlery, and stores we bought at Shanghai were, besides being outrageously dear, of very inferior quality. On opening the cases in the desert, we found at least a quarter of the provisions uneatable. The American firm who furnished us must make a good thing of it if they do business with all their customers on the same terms.

The operation of packing was by no means easy. As the reader is perhaps aware, the weight on a camel's back must be quite equally distributed on either side, otherwise (in Mongolia at least) the animal lies down and utterly declines to move a step. Eight strong wooden chests, with padlocks, met all our requirements, and having made our

adieus to our hospitable friends, we embarked, the 31st of May, on the coasting-steamer *Tungchow* for the port of Pekin, Tientsin.

We were presented before leaving Shanghai with a so-called itinerary on the journey we were taking, written by an Englishman resident in China, who had travelled the caravan route from Pekin to Europe in 1872. Things must have changed considerably, both in Mongolia and Siberia, since those days, for almost all the book contained, including distances, was so inaccurate and misleading that we discarded its use long before we reached Kiakhta.

The "*Tungchow*" was more like a yacht than a cargo boat, and the run up coast was delightful; with bright sunshine and light cool breezes, exactly like Mediterranean weather in early spring, though the nights were very cold, and one was glad of an overcoat. We passed daily numbers of fishing junks, their dark brown mat-sails and bright red and yellow banners standing out in picturesque contrast to the clear blue sea, which often for miles round us was dotted with net corks and men in small canoes. A gale springs up in a few minutes in these latitudes, and during the typhoon season many of these poor fishermen, unable to

get back to the junks, are blown out to sea and drowned, their companions on the huge, swirling craft, being, of course, unable to render them any assistance. The captain of the *Tungchow* told us that many lives are lost annually in this manner.

We reached Chefoo late at night, and were therefore unable to land, as we were off again at daybreak. This is the Brighton of Shanghai and Pekin. There is capital bathing here, and many good hotels, which are crowded to overflowing in the summer months by Europeans escaping from the damp, steamy heat of Shanghai, and the no less disagreeable odours, and "dust fogs" (I can call them nothing else) of the capital.

The coast lying between Chefoo and the mouth of the Peiho river is strikingly like parts of Devonshire. But for the absence of houses and bathing machines, one might have been off Torquay or Dawlish. Precipitous red cliffs, with smooth green sward growing to their very edges, met by broad smooth yellow sands, while here and there great masses of rock run out for a considerable distance into the clear blue water. Further inland neatly trimmed hedges, clumps of fir-trees, and snug-looking farm-

houses surrounded with orchards and gardens, recalled visions of clotted cream, and pretty peasant girls in that loveliest of all English counties, the true garden of England: Devonshire.

At daybreak on the 3rd of June we passed the celebrated Taku forts and entered the Peiho river. It was a bright lovely morning, and as a bend of the river hid it from our sight, and we looked at the blue sunlit ocean for the last time, it was not without some misgivings at the long land journey before us. The thought that when next we saw the sea, it would be at Calais, made us realize, perhaps more than we had as yet done, the difficulty and length of the voyage we had undertaken across the breadth of Europe and Asia.

Unlike most rivers, the Peiho seems to widen as you ascend it, being considerably narrower at the mouth than at Tientsin, thirty miles inland. The town of Taku, a wretched-looking place, built for the most part of mud houses, is by water inaccessible for five months of the year, on account of the ice in the Peiho and Gulf of Pechili. It is a curious fact that although Taku is so cold in winter, it never snows, and there is usually a bright, cloudless sky and cutting

north-easter blowing. Wretched as is its appearance, Taku looks a busy place, and contains a Chinese naval dockyard. The Taku forts commanding the entrance to the river have been greatly strengthened during the last ten years, the work being carried on under the personal supervision of German officers.

We were rather puzzled, on first entering the Peiho, at what appeared in the distance like a number of large merry-go-rounds scattered over the flat swampy plain surrounding the town, and revolving without cessation. It was only by the aid of glasses that we made them out to be salt-mills worked by huge mat sails. The sea-water is pumped into the vats by the aid of this irrigation and allowed to evaporate in the sun. The salt which remains is then piled into large stacks and covered with thick matting. The effect at a distance of these dozens of huge mills revolving on the bare desolate plain with not a living object near them, was curious in the extreme. The river scenery from Taku to Tangchow very much resembles that of the Nile, the houses of dried mud, with their flat roofs and terraces, the absence of trees except occasional palms, remind one not a little of an Egyptian landscape, while the uniform dark blue garb of the peasantry, of exactly

the same shade as that worn by the Fellaheen, heightens, at a distance, the illusion.

Although only thirty miles distant as the crow flies, Tientsin is quite eighty by river from Taku, for the Peiho is, towards the mouth, the most tortuous river in the world. It is not unusual to steam steadily on for an hour, and find yourself, at the expiration of that time only a few hundred yards from where you started. The effect produced by the shipping ascending and descending the river is very odd, the intricate bends of the river giving the steamers the appearance of moving about on dry land. The marshes I have mentioned do not extend for more than about ten miles inland. They are then succeeded by rich fertile plains of rice and cotton irrigated in the Egyptian manner by means of "shadoofs" from the waters of the Peiho. The country seemed pretty thickly populated. Some of the mud villages by the water side must have contained quite a thousand inhabitants, but in China, where the population is so enormous, this is looked upon as a small hamlet!

There is a large coal-wharf a short distance from Taku, where the coal from the Kai Ping mine, fifty miles distant, is brought by means

of a small railway and barges. The coal, though rather dusty, is excellent for steamer purposes, and the private company working it make a very fair percentage. It has always seemed curious to me that coal is not more extensively worked in the Chinese Empire, when there are more than four hundred thousand square miles of it! There are, however, but very few mines in existence.

Tientsin, which has a population of about nine hundred and fifty thousand stands at the junction of the Grand Canal with the Peiho river. It is not a prepossessing place at first sight, nor did its dusty, bustling quays, warehouses, and noisy, perspiring coolies, make us at all anxious to prolong our stay longer than was absolutely necessary. The trade of Tientsin is not great when compared with the other treaty ports. Nearly all the tea exported thence goes to Russia and Siberia—occasionally by way of Pekin —but in most cases *viâ* Kalgan and district across the Gobi Desert to Kiakhta, without touching at the capital. The Russian merchants are therefore nearly as numerous as the English at Tientsin.

The settlement boasted of but two hotels, and these of a very fifth-rate description. Small-pox having broken out in one, our choice was limited, for we did

not care to run the risk of being laid up for three or four weeks in the native hospital at Pekin. Bidding adieu to our genial skipper, who cheerfully expressed a hope that he might see us again one day, though he very much doubted our ever leaving Siberia, we made our way, accompanied by a yelling crowd of half-naked coolies bearing our luggage, to the American Hotel, an uninviting, dilapidated-looking hostelry enough. In the verandah, reclining on many chairs, and at intervals refreshing himself from a huge beaker of brandy and soda, was an individual pointed out to us as the proprietor (a fat, sleepy-looking Yankee), whose welcome was hardly encouraging.

"Can we have rooms here?"

"Sure I don't know, you'd better ask."

"But you're the manager, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes, I'm the manager."

A pause, during which our friend takes a long pull at the brandy, and, emerging considerably refreshed, composes himself calmly to slumber.

"Who are we to ask?"

"Who are you to ask?" half opening his eyes; "Oh! I don't know, you will see some of the China boys about. How should I know who you're to

ask?" is his parting shot as we leave him and cross the dirty sanded billiard-room, hung with tawdry prints, and redolent of stale tobacco and spirits, that precedes the entrance to the "bar."

Here we glean from a dishevelled, greasy German in shirt-sleeves, who looks as if he slept among the sawdust and empty whisky bottles that litter the floor, that no rooms are to be had that night, or for the next week to come, for love or money. A huge travelling circus belonging to an Italian, one Chiarini, has taken every available room in the place. "Then could we have the billiard-table?" "No, we could not possibly have the billiard-table, for the 'gentlemen' connected with the circus always played till three or four in the morning. Still, we could have it then, if we liked, on payment of a small remuneration to him (the occupant of the bar), but we must keep it dark from the boss."

Our experience of the "boss" did not quite justify our taking this course, and we left the hotel, sadly and slowly followed by our string of sympathizing coolies, utterly at a loss to know what to do till the bright thought struck Lancaster of at once hiring the house-boat which was to take us to Tungchow (the landing-place for Pekin), and living

on board her till we left for the capital. We managed this, not without some difficulty, for we had to get the boat through our friend the sleepy Yankee. He woke up a little, however, at the prospect of swindling two helpless and friendless fellow-creatures, and by sun-down we had everything on board, and the boat snugly moored off the hotel wharf. We were alongside a large open drain, with a most abominable stench, and there was always the possibility of being run down in the night by a passing ship, but one could not afford to be particular. The sight, however, of a large passenger steamer bound for Japan which passed close to us towards sundown was depressing in the extreme, the cleanliness and luxury on board contrasting so painfully with our own surroundings. For a few moments we almost regretted (by no means for the last time) that we had ever undertaken this voyage, the discomforts and difficulties of which now seemed to increase with every day.

Early next day we presented our letters to Mr. S., the Russian tea merchant, who was to provide us with letters of credit for his agents at Irkoutsk and Tomsk in Eastern and Western Siberia. Mr. S. did not give us a very favourable account of the journey before us. Like almost every other Russian we met,

first question was "Mais que Diable allez-vous faire en Sibérie?" We got into the way at last of never arguing this question. In the first place it was useless, and only caused waste of time; in the second we had literally no reason to give, except perhaps the one so dear to most Englishmen: "The country had been crossed by so few travellers before!"

Among other pleasant and encouraging items of news, we now heard that we should probably meet with serious delay, not only at Kalgan, the Mongolian frontier, but also at Pekin. "You had better not think," said Mr. S., "of making any definite plans till you arrive at Kalgan. This is the worst time of year you could have chosen. It is not the caravan season; the camels are all out on the plains. It may be two or three months before you are able to cross the Gobi, and then you will get into Siberia at the very worst time of year, when the roads are next to impassable from rains and floods. Any day you may be detained by a broken bridge or a landslip, and have to wait in some dreary, wretched village in the wilds of Siberia, till the snow sets, and enables you to finish your journey in sleighs. You cannot, I feel sure, have rightly estimated the diffi-

culties before you. Why go to Siberia at all, when that earthly paradise Japan is so near?" &c., &c.

We at last succeeded in making Mr. S. understand that we were determined to get as far as Pekin at any rate; and, our interview over, had nothing but the purchase of some provisions for our river journey (our Shanghai store was not opened till we reached the desert) to detain us in Tientsin. Nor were we sorry to get away, for the dust and filth of this city were almost unbearable. We had not then experienced the odours of Pekin, which would accustom one to cheerfully live in a main drain.

Our second night here was not so pleasantly passed as the first. A shower of rain at sunset brought out legions of mosquitoes, from which, not having brought curtains, we suffered a good deal of annoyance, and the intolerable stench of the drain near which we lay was so increased by the rain that we had to smoke incessantly till past 3 a.m., almost regretting we had not accepted the barkeeper's offer of the billiard-table for a bed. Even the "circus gentlemen" would have been preferable to the sewer. We got to sleep about 4 a.m.,

only to be awoke at daybreak by a crashing sound and to find the water rushing into the boat, with an unpleasant conviction that our craft was heeling over at a very uncomfortable angle. We had become entangled in the hawser of a large ocean-steamer, which, had it not been let go in the nick of time, would have upset us altogether. We escaped with a ducking, however, and soon got the boat righted and baled out again.

The distance from Tientsin to Pekin is rather under eighty miles overland, that by river one hundred and forty, viz. one hundred and twenty miles to Tungchow, and twenty miles thence by road to the capital. Although it takes two days longer (sometimes three), we chose the water route in preference to the other. We should, we thought, have quite enough land-travelling during the next five months; besides which, the Chinese inns between Tientsin and the capital are even filthier than those between Pekin and the Great Wall—which is saying a good deal.

It was about ten o'clock, on a bright, clear morning, that we hoisted the huge mat-sail, and, with a favourable breeze, soon left the bustling city and its high cathedral towers (where the Catholic

nuns were so brutally murdered in 1870) low on the horizon.

The traffic on the Peiho river for some miles above Tientsin is enormous. We must have counted at least four hundred boats and barges in the space of an hour the afternoon of the day we left, while the whole way to Tungchow the river was alive with boats of every description whenever we passed a village, from huge junks to tiny sampans. At times, near Tientsin, one could have crossed the river, or walked three hundred or four hundred yards up it, dry shod on the boats.

A Chinese house-boat, though comfortable enough for all practical purposes, must not be confounded with the luxurious, flower-bedecked craft that line the banks of the Thames in summer time. The Chinese house-boat resembles the English only in name, for there was no attempt at decoration, and very little at cleanliness. About forty-five feet long, it was decked completely over, except in the centre, where a sort of well covered with planks, with space enough for two to lie or sit in, formed the cabin.

Our crew, five in number, slept in a kind of nutch under the deck forward. How they all managed to stow themselves there at once was a

mystery to me, for they were great, tall, hulking fellows. We sailed, as a rule, our broad mat-sail sending the old tub along at an incredible speed with the lightest breeze. When the wind dropped, the men rowed incessantly, day and night, till it rose again. The amount of work they got through was simply marvellous. Nothing seemed to tire them; morning, noon, and night they plied the heavy, awkward sweeps without cessation, except to eat a dish of rice and fish and take a drink of cold tea once every twelve hours. Cheery, good-tempered fellows they were too, considering the small wages they got. The fare, including everything, was only $13, and our Yankee friend must have got at least two-thirds of this sum as his own share of the transaction.

The first two days of our river journey were enjoyable enough, save for such small annoyances as rats and cockroaches, which latter took forcible possession of our cabin at night-time. But the delightful weather and novel scenery amply atoned for such small discomforts as these. The Peiho is a thick, muddy stream. Its banks are continually slipping down and being dammed up by the natives, which accounts in a great measure for

the dirty pea-soup colour of the water. These land-slips are not of weekly or even daily occurrence. They occur incessantly, and it was curious to watch, as we ascended the river, the continual dropping away of the land on either side, while, here and there, gangs of men repaired the damage by means of cemented bamboos. The riverside villages were like human beehives, so crowded and dense did the population of them appear, even at midday, when so many of the inhabitants must have been out at work in the fields. One could not help wondering how even such an enormous country as China can support such a dense population, numbering, by the last census, some 400,000,000. And yet, from the time we left the coast till we reached the Mongolian border, there was always vegetation of some kind or other to be seen, and vast fertile plains of corn, barley, and millet stretched away on every side to the horizon. Everything in North China is on such a large scale that for a few days one scarcely realized how enormous the population and fertilization of this huge empire really are, how great its resources and demands.

Our days on the Peiho were amusing enough. There was always something to look at on the

bank, and a capital towing-path to walk on when one's legs got tired and cramped in the boat, so that we had nothing to complain of in the way of variety, and the first two days, bright and sunny, wore away as idly and pleasantly as summer days up the Thames or Wye in England. It was pleasant to sit out in the evening in the cool, clear moonlight, on the little deck, the silence unbroken save by the regular plash of the oars, or twang of Chinese fiddle or guitar, as we passed some lonely, riverside cottage, the arms of the solitary, half-naked musician gleaming white in the moonlight, as he rose and waved a good-night to our crew. When we passed a village after dark it was like some weird transformation scene, for up to midnight these water-side settlements appeared, from the river at least, to be given up to revelry. We never, however, ventured into one, preferring to gaze from a respectful distance upon the flaring torches throwing counter effects of light and shade over the quaint, picturesque houses and pagodas, the hurrying crowds on the banks; while the clashing of gongs and cymbals from the joss-house or theatre heightened the effect of the strange scene. Then on again along the silent moonlit stream, with its low sedgy banks;

nothing to mar the flat, monotonous outline of the moonlit landscape, but, here and there, a huge square mound of earth, the tomb of some departed mandarin or village magnate.

But the morning of the third day looked dull and overcast, and by ten o'clock the rain was pouring down in torrents. There was no keeping dry, for the ramshackle roof leaked like a sieve, and the floor of our cabin was in a very few minutes almost ankle-deep in water. About midday a terrific thunderstorm broke over us. The lightning was so vivid that although every nook and cranny of our dilapidated hutch was tightly closed, and the place in semi-darkness, it almost blinded one. I have never, even in the tropics, heard the thunder so loud and continuous. One peal lasted quite a minute without cessation.

I have seldom passed a more miserable day than that one moored by the muddy banks of the Peiho, for progress was impossible. Cooking or lighting a fire, too, was out of the question. Everything, including matches and fuel, was sopping through and through. Looking out of our wooden prison, nothing met the eye but grey, driving mist, and steady, unceasing rain, falling with a

persistence and violence that lashed the brown muddy waters around us into a sheet of grey foam. The men forward were battened down, and seemed unconcerned enough, as snatches of song rising from below and occasional whiffs of smoke emerging through the chinks in the deck testified. We almost envied them their warmth, shivering as we were like half-drowned rats. About five o'clock a break in the grey, misty sky appeared, and half an hour later the sun was shining in a sky of cloudless blue, while we rapidly cut our way through the water before a light but piercingly cold breeze, so sudden and complete are the changes of weather in these latitudes.

Early the next day a chain of precipitous mountains broke the horizon. Beyond them lay our destination, Pekin. We were, however, still two days off, for the river here shallows considerably, and we frequently stuck hard and fast during the day. At these times the whole crew would divest themselves of their clothes, and, fastening a couple of stout ropes to the bows of the boat, tow us off again into deep water. Landing here was impossible, for one could not get within ten yards or so of the bank. Some of the

larger junks were being towed by as many as thirty or forty men. On the deck of one a huge deal case bearing the name of Maple and Co., London, in large black letters, looked strangely out of keeping with the uncivilized surroundings.

It was only the fifth morning after leaving Tientsin that we hove in sight of Tungchow, a "village" of something over one hundred thousand inhabitants. This was our first experience of a real Chinese town, far from European influence; and we were rather agreeably disappointed, for at a distance, it looked clean and inviting. A closer acquaintance, alas! somewhat modified first impressions.

Moored alongside the flat muddy banks were a perfect colony of junks, two thousand or three thousand in number; an interval of flat boggy ground cut up by innumerable cesspools, open drains and dust-heaps divided these from the town wall, which, standing back about a couple of hundred yards from the water's edge, hid the town from view, except where, at intervals, a tower or pagoda overtopped the loopholed brick battlements. Although the sun had but just risen, the banks were crowded with people, and the keepers of hundreds of stalls and booths

were already doing a brisk trade in the sale of cloths, pigtails, tea, sweetmeats, and fans to the junk population, while here and there a barber plied his trade, which in North China is anything but an appetizing one to look upon. Dirty as the place and people were, the bright, cloudless sky and sunshine lent a gaiety to the scene, which for colour and animation I have seldom seen equalled in the most picturesque Turkish cities or bazaars of the far East.

We were ready to start at midday, and had all the baggage safely stowed away in Pekin carts, a more dirty or uncomfortable vehicle than which does not exist. As it is of the same construction, although smaller than the carts in which we crossed the desert, I will leave the description of these "torture-boxes" to a future chapter. Seeing with the naked eye whole regiments of vermin crawling over the one destined for our reception, we preferred to ride ahead, on donkeys, under the guidance of a small boy, whose powers of conversation were limitless, and who talked incessantly the whole way, frequently interlarding his conversation with the words "Yang Qweitze" (Foreign Devil), the uncomplimentary

title bestowed on every European, of whatever nationality, in the less civilized parts of China. Nor was the filthy state of the carts our only reason for riding. We had serious misgivings as to whether the clumsy, heavily-laden conveyances would reach Pekin before nightfall, in which case we should have had to pass the night in the open outside the walls. The gates of the city are shut at sundown, and no human power (short of the emperor's special command) will open them till sunrise the following day.

It took us nearly an hour to get clear of Tung-chow and into the open country. The town is (for China) fairly clean, though the streets are narrow, tortuous and ill paved, and in some places there were holes two or three feet deep in the centre of the roadway.

The natives in this part of China present a striking contrast to their countrymen at Shanghai and further south; whereas the latter are for the most part puny, pasty-faced creatures, these were fine, strapping, broad-shouldered men, with healthy, ruddy faces. The women too were better-looking, though doll-like and thickly painted, with the baggy, shapeless figures, deformed feet, and stoop peculiar to

their race. Many of the shops were devoted to the sale of Manchester goods and cheap cutlery, which find great favour among the people in this part of China. Here and there a large tea-house, gorgeously decorated, was filled with customers taking their morning draught of the cup that cheers. The tea drunk by the Chinese is as different to our idea of that beverage as it can well be, and is, to a European palate, utterly flavourless. "Chacun à son goût." Many Russians say that real, unadulterated tea never finds its way to England, nor would the English drink it if it did.

It took us quite an hour to get clear of Tungchow, for the streets were crowded to overflowing. Although so few Europeans are seen here, the people took very little notice of us, excepting the juvenile population, ragged little wretches, a crowd of whom pestered us for cash, which, when refused, drew down upon us yells of derision and curses on the "Yang Qweitze" in general.

The road from Tungchow to Pekin lies through a fertile, well-wooded country, and is for the first three or four miles raised some ten feet from the ground on either side, and paved with huge stone slabs, apparently of great antiquity. Although now

in a very dilapidated condition, this must in former times have been a splendid thoroughfare. It reminded one of one of the old Roman roads, some of the slabs being quite ten feet long by five feet broad and two thick. The going was very bad in places where these stones had fallen away. Turning away to admire the scenery, I was somewhat suddenly recalled to the situation by finding that my donkey had slipped into one of these chasms about four feet deep. We got out, however, with nothing worse than a few bruises. This road is said at one time to have extended as far as Pekin, but, with characteristic carelessness, the Chinese have allowed it to become so dilapidated, that after two miles or so it ceases altogether, and our way lay along narrow, raised paths, running through millet and barley fields. Eight li from Tungchow, we passed the picturesque bridge of "Palikao," from which the French general takes his name. Hard by a little tea-house clustering in the shade of willow-trees afforded us grateful shelter for half an hour, and we dismounted and took a few cups of the cool refreshing drink, for the road was dusty, and the sun very powerful.

As we sat on mats, enjoying the cool breeze from

the river, half a dozen soldiers rode by with a prisoner, whom they were taking to Tungchow, to undergo sentence of death by the "Ling Chi." The poor wretch looked ghastly pale, and well he might, for this is perhaps the most barbarous and revolting of all Chinese punishments. The word "Ling Chi" means literally to be cut in ten thousand pieces. As the reader may care to know how the operation is performed, I will give a brief account of an execution of this kind which took place at Canton only last year.

"As soon as the signal was given the victim was stripped of his clothing—the process of binding and gagging being made unnecessarily long. By the time it was over the poor wretch was almost fainting with terror. Previous to the commencement of the operation a draught of arrak was given him, and then commenced the work of butchery.

"Two deep cuts over each eye commenced the operation. Gashes which turned great pieces of flesh over, and left the bone exposed. Then a cut down each cheek, and a deeper one across each shoulder, nearly but not quite severing the arm from its socket. A circular cut to the bone in each

upper arm and fore-arm followed, and then, stepping back to get more scope, the executioner hacked off the right hand with one blow. A large piece of flesh was then cut or rather dug out of each thigh, and from over each knee, and the flesh torn off both kneecaps. The calves of the legs were then cut off.

"Up till now a straight heavy sword had been the weapon used. The human devil who acted as executioner wielding it with as much ease and dexterity as if he had been carving a fowl. The sword was now put aside, and a thin-bladed knife, about a foot long, driven in to the hilt, under the right breast-bone, the executioner working it slowly round and round while his assistant fanned the victim with a large palm-leaf fan for the double purpose of keeping the flies off, and hiding the contortions of the poor wretch's face, who was not yet dead, as evinced by the twitching of the fingers of his remaining hand. Ten or twelve seconds more of this diabolical torture, and the victim was cut down from the cross, to fall, inert and helpless, on his knees and face. He was then decapitated and the sentence completed."

These barbarous and disgusting proceedings

seem the more awful when we consider that the poor wretch whose execution I have described was not the actual author of the crime for which he suffered. He was what is known in China as a "substitute." There are many in this strange land, who for a small sum of money will cheerfully die for the pleasure of two or three days spent in dissipation and riot. The murderer himself was probably looking on with the crowd, unmoved at what should by rights have been his own execution.

There are other Chinese punishments quite as revolting as the Ling Chi, which do not, however, necessarily end in death. A very common one (to be seen almost daily in the streets of Pekin) is the "Cangue," two large pieces of wood, each with a semicircular hole in the middle, which are worn round the neck. The hands are placed at right angles through other holes in the board, which weighs from sixty to two hundred pounds according to circumstances. This is worn from three days to two, or even three, months according to the nature of the crime. The "Cage" is another very common punishment, and is used for minor offences. The wretched occupant of this

can neither sit, stand, nor lie down. Prisoners are kept in this position for a period varying from a week to a month. In the latter case they are usually rendered cripples for life. Another favourite punishment (often used to punish adultery) is pulling out the hand and toe nails, teeth, eye-lashes, and nostrils; but perhaps the most painful of any is the "Wire Shirt," a thin wire garment made to fit the body so tightly that small pieces of skin are pressed through every aperture. A sharp razor is then passed over these outside, so that when the shirt is removed the victim from head to waist is one piece of raw quivering flesh.

Many others could I cite, but enough of this unsavoury subject. China is full of contradictions, and none are more striking than the cruelty and kindness of its population, for there exists no kinder-hearted or more liberal being than the Chinaman. There are, of course, exceptions; the rebel Yeh, for instance, who was degraded by the Emperor for treachery in 1857, when brought to Calcutta, where he died, confessed to having executed more than 70,000 souls while he was in office.

We rode slowly on the whole afternoon through

fields of grain, pretty villages asleep in the sun, with no sign of life in them but beggars and dogs lying huddled in the dusty road, under the shade of wall or shed, sleeping away the hot, silent hours in indolent content. It seemed at times as if we should never reach Pekin, though the mountains beyond it looked provokingly close in the bright clear atmosphere. The heat was intense, but a cool breeze now and then sprung up, and made it not unpleasant travelling as we rode through some of the prettiest scenery it has ever been my lot to look upon. The golden fields of oats and barley, the pretty villages dotted here and there over the plain, the ruddy, healthy-looking peasantry at work gathering in the harvest, and, here and there, the country-seat of some wealthy Mandarin, with its broad avenues, willow-fringed lake, and deer park, wore a happy, civilized look strangely at variance with one's preconceived notions of the remoter parts of the Celestial Empire. Had it not been for the quaint pagodas and temples resplendent in crimson and gold carvings that we passed every mile or so, one might have fancied oneself in some picturesque corner of far away England.

One circumstance alone considerably marred our enjoyment of the lovely scenery—to wit, the streams of beggars who towards evening came out by hundreds from the holes and corners in which they had been lying during the heat of the day. A more importunate or determined set of wretches I never saw. Ranging from the ages of five to fifty, half naked and covered with sores, the wretches refused to be driven off, and insisted on accompanying us in unpleasant proximity—some of them for miles. Now and anon one would run forward, and kneeling, beat his head upon the ground—an operation called in China the "Koo-Too." Passing through one of the villages, I fairly lost my temper, and turning round, shook my stick at the yelling, dancing ruffians, who, much to the amusement of the villagers, almost barred our progress. The effect was magical. In a second their demeanour changed, and what had been a crowd of cringing, supplicating wretches turned to a hooting, menacing crowd. Things looked awkward at first, and I thought, for a few moments, we were in for an ugly row. Mud and stones were showered on us freely, and one gaunt leprous-looking individual, half naked,

ran up on his crutches and seized my donkey's bridle. Seeing from the indifferent and half-amused expression on the bystanders' faces that we should get no help from *them*, I thought discretion the better part of valour, and scattered a handful of cash among our persecutors, which had the effect of slowly dispersing them. This *contretemps*, trivial as it was, showed the danger of ever for a moment annoying the people in the country we were about to travel through. Though good-tempered and hospitable, the Northern Chinaman has but a very poor idea of a European, English or otherwise. Indeed, I doubt if the majority of the peasantry had ever heard of England.

The approach to Pekin from Tungchow is anything but imposing, and we were rather disappointed at our first sight of the celestial city. The country for a mile or so before reaching the gates is so densely wooded that we did not know we had reached the capital till we found ourselves actually under its massive crenellated walls. The latter are surmounted by lofty square towers which, with their bright apple-green porce-

lain roofs and gaudy façades relieve to a certain extent the barren appearance of the sandy waste that surrounds Pekin. Not a roof or tower of the city is visible from here, nothing but the high rugged walls which, notwithstanding their great age, are in good repair. There was nothing to tell one that on the other side of these there lay a place almost as large as Paris in area and population. Nothing but the hoarse, subdued murmur, confused and indistinct, that hangs over every great city.

A few hundred yards brought us to the gate of the Tartar city, and, ye gods! what a city! Upon first entering, it seemed as if a dense fog had suddenly descended upon one, but a look back at the bright sunshine outside the gates soon dispelled the illusion, and explained the mystery: it was nothing but dust, the black, fine, and searching dust, for which Pekin is famous. Everything was coated with it. One breathed it in with every inhalation, till eyes, mouth, and nose were choked up, and breathing became almost an impossibility. No one seemed to mind it much, though our donkeys laboured through it nearly knee-deep.

We rode for some distance along the filthy, dusty streets. There is no rule of the road in Pekin, and it took one all one's time to steer safely through the carts, sedans, mule litters, and camel caravans which thronged the streets. At length we turned into the principal thoroughfare, a broad unpaved street, raised in the centre, on either side of which one saw a long vista of low roofed houses, scrubby trees, and gaudy shop-signs, lost in the distance in a cloud of dust. We were in Pekin at last.

In Pekin, but apparently a long way yet from our destination, the Hôtel de Pékin; and judging from our small guide's very erratic movements, we were not likely for some time to reach that friendly hostelry, which is kept by an enterprising Frenchman, M. ——. The disagreeable suspicion that our guide had lost his way became a certainty, when turning down a narrow by-lane, he brought us up all standing at the door of a filthy tea-house. It was not a pleasant predicament. Imagine a Central African suddenly turned loose in the streets of London, and you have our position—with this difference, that the African

would have had the pull over us in the shape of a friendly policeman to take him to the station. Here, in this city of nearly two million inhabitants, it seemed unlikely enough that we should come across any of the English-speaking inhabitants, who number fifty to sixty at the most.

Threats of punishment and vengeance on the small boy were useless. He simply seated himself, and calling for a cup of tea, informed us we must find our way ourselves, he did not know it—at least that is what we inferred from his gestures, which were disrespectful in the extreme. With a lively recollection of our escape of the afternoon, we did not care to risk another disturbance, so, resigning ourselves to circumstances, dismounted and called for tea.

It was not a pleasant half-hour, for we were surrounded in less than five minutes by a crowd of the most insolent, dirtiest ruffians imaginable. We had evidently been brought to one of the very lowest quarters of the town, and were not sorry to have left our watches in the carts. With the exception of our revolvers and a few cash they would

not have been much the richer for robbing us. I should be sorry to have much to do with the inhabitants of the Chinese capital. There is no more obliging and hospitable being than the Chinese peasant, no more insolent, arrogant thief than the lower order of Pekinese. The victory of the imperial troops over the French in Tonquin is, in a great measure, responsible for the insolence displayed by the inhabitants of Pekin towards Europeans. Insults are perpetrated almost daily, and in the open streets, for which there is no redress, and it is only necessary to go for a very short walk in the streets of the capital to see that the lesson taught the Celestials by the allied troops in 1860 has long since been forgotten.

We should probably have had to pass the night in this unsavoury den, had not a European passed and by the greatest luck caught sight of us through the narrow gateway. Our deliverer, Mr. P., an American missionary, himself escorted us through a labyrinth of crowded streets and squares to Legation Street. We should certainly never have found our way otherwise, for there were no outward and visible signs even here of European inhabitants,

till just before reaching the hotel, we passed the French Embassy, and saw, through an open gateway, a spacious shady garden with smooth-shaven lawns, cedars, and fountains, while over the doorway, in large gold letters on a vermilion ground, were the words "Légation de France." A couple of hundred yards further on we pulled up at the door of our caravanserai. Thanking and taking leave of our friend, we entered the building, and were not sorry to find ourselves in the cool, grey-tiled, flower-bordered courtyard of the hotel; where a whisky and soda with plenty of ice washed the dust out of our throats and refreshed us not a little after our long and somewhat eventful ride.

The baggage arrived an hour after, and after a bath and change we felt well disposed to do justice to the excellent dinner provided for us by M. ——, the repast being graced by the presence of his wife, pretty Madame ——, and her sister. Sitting out after dinner in the little moonlit courtyard redolent of heliotrope and mignonette, one might have fancied oneself hundreds of miles from the dusty, ill-smelling city, and its barbaric population. The smells

did not, thank goodness, penetrate here; and for the first time since leaving Tientsin, we thoroughly enjoyed an after-dinner cigar, not a little relieved that the starting-point, at any rate, of our long land journey had been safely reached.

CHAPTER II.

PEKIN.

It was only in the year 1421 that Pekin became the capital of the Chinese Empire. It was up to that period merely the chief town of Northern China, as its name "Pe," north, "Ching," city, denotes; but when Nankin, the ancient capital, was abandoned, the seat of government was transferred to its present situation. A worse site for a capital, both commercially and socially, can scarcely be imagined, for although connected by canal with the Peiho river, and thus in summer with the rest of the civilized world, the ice in winter entirely suspends water communication. It is, therefore, for five months of the year, practically a prison for the fifty or sixty Europeans located within its grass-grown walls, for few are rash enough to attempt a journey overland to Chefoo or Shanghai.

There is little or no foreign trade with Pekin,

and with one exception no European merchants live there. The embassies of various nations, English and American missions, and professors connected with the college form the majority of the European population. A good deal of difference of opinion exists as to the native population of the capital. Some say it is a million and a half, others not more than nine hundred thousand. In the opinion of Professor P——, who has resided for over twenty years in the place, and is well up in Chinese matters, it is considerably over a million, of whom two-thirds inhabit the Tartar city. The remainder are Chinese, who yearly increase, while their Tartar neighbours are diminishing in number.

In shape Pekin may be roughly described as a square within an oblong, the former standing for the Tartar city, the latter for the Chinese. The outer walls, which are about sixty feet high and of immense thickness, stand about a hundred and fifty yards from the city itself, the space between being occupied by barren sandy waste, along which in the season hundreds of caravans may be seen daily wending their way to or from the Mongolian Desert and Manchuria. Inside this, again, are two

smaller walls, also, however, of considerable height, enclosing the imperial and forbidden cities, that enclosing the latter being surmounted with bright yellow tiles, the imperial colour, which none but the Emperor or Queen Regent are permitted to make use of. A Roman Catholic church was built not far from the walls of the Imperial Palace two or three years since, and, in ignorance presumably, the European architect was commencing to roof it over with tiles of the sacred colour, when luckily warned of the risk he was running by one of the European residents; not, however, before it had come to the Emperor's ears, and since then the poor priests connected with the building are given no peace. The two high western towers which flank the building are visited night and day by a mandarin, to see that no steps have been built up them by the foreign devils, whence they may survey the palaces and gardens of the imperial city. Latterly, to make assurance doubly sure, the walls of the latter have been raised to the height of the church towers at the point where the latter face them.

There are nine gates in all in the outer wall, situated in various parts of the city, and called after the points of the compass at which they stand;

viz., the North Gate, South Gate, North-west Gate, and so on. These are closed at seven in summer, and six in winter, and woe to the luckless wretch who is locked out, for the guard dare not open under pain of death till sunrise the following morning, be it in the height of summer or the thermometer below zero. The inhabitants cannot complain of due notice not being given. For full half an hour before closing time there is at every guard-house or gate a beating of gongs and clashing of cymbals that would awaken the dead. Then at the hour to a second the guard give one long unearthly yell, and the ponderous iron-bound gates are thrown together with a crash till six or seven the next morning.

All the walls are built facing the four points of the compass, and the principal thoroughfares and streets run parallel to them. Notwithstanding this apparent regularity and simplicity of construction, the Chinese capital is the easiest place in the world to lose yourself in, as we frequently found; so much so, that after the first time we always employed a guide when we took our walks abroad.

Our first impressions of Pekin were not favourable, for a dustier, noisier, dirtier place it has never been

my lot to visit. Upon entering the Hat Ta Men Gate the city presents more the appearance of a huge fair than anything else, for the crowded streets are lined with canvas booths and tents as well as houses. The roads are very broad, some so much so as to dwarf the low rickety dwellings, gaudy with gold and crimson signs and waving banners, into insignificance. The streets are unpaved and raised in the centre to a height of three or four feet for carriage traffic, the space on either side being reserved for foot-passengers, though there did not seem to be any marked distinction, the carts using both ways as they liked.

In dry weather the streets of Pekin are over ankle-deep in dust, in wet weather are simply a morass. Being worn away in places into holes of two or three feet deep, the effects of the clouds of dust or showers of water that every cart-wheel throws up and around may be imagined. At intervals of about fifty yards along the footway are holes eight or nine feet deep. These are receptacles for every species of filth; in fact, serve the purpose of stationary sewers (for Pekin is not drained), and are only cleaned out when quite full (about once a week). In very dry weather, when water

is scarce, the dust is laid with the liquid filth they contain, an operation hardly tending to cool or purify the atmosphere!

If we, in England, must eat, according to the proverb, a peck of dirt before we die, I feel convinced that the inhabitants of Pekin swallow at least a hundredweight before their last hour. The dust of Pekin is, next to its smells, undoubtedly its greatest curse. There is no escaping from the fine, brown powder that chokes up eyes, nose and mouth, and finds its way into everything—your food, your clothes, your very boots. There is a saying among the Chinese, that it will worm its way into a watch-glass. Not only is it productive of considerable physical discomfort and annoyance, but it gives a depressing, gloomy look to everything, which on a really dusty day makes it impossible to discern objects one hundred yards off. The sun may be shining brightly outside the city walls, when within all is dark and murky as a thick November fog in London could make it. Indeed it is far worse than the latter, which you can, at any rate, shut out to a certain extent with closely drawn curtains and brightly-lit rooms.

Pekin is by no means an unhealthy city, not-

withstanding the disgusting and uncleanly habits of its population, and its low situation (only one hundred and twenty feet above sea level). Strange to say, the good health of its inhabitants is attributed in a great measure to the dust, which acts as a deodorizer and disinfectant to the heaps of filth and garbage one encounters at every turn bleaching and rotting in the sunshine. The climate is, on the whole, good, the only really unhealthy months being those of July, August and September, when the rainfall is excessive. The extremes of temperature, however, are somewhat trying to Europeans of weak constitution. For instance, in July the thermometer is often up to over 100° in the shade, while in winter it frequently falls to below zero. When an epidemic does occur, it is severe, for the Chinese are much prone to fright and panic during these visitations. Cholera broke out only four or five years since, and carried off an average of twelve hundred daily. The two greatest scourges are small-pox and diphtheria, and an enormous number of deaths occur annually from the latter disease in early spring. Typhoid fever and ophthalmia (from the dust) are also prevalent at times, but small-pox is the

commonest disease among the Chinese themselves, who look upon it very much as we do upon measles, although it is none the less fatal for all that. As a prevention, the native doctors inoculate by blowing a quantity of the virus of the actual disease up the nostrils. I was made unpleasantly aware of this fact by one of the hotel servants, who spoke a few words of English. Noticing that one of his nostrils was stopped up with a dirty piece of cotton wool, I inquired if he had hurt his nose. "Oh, no," was the reply, "smol-pok!" This habit has, no doubt, a great deal to do with the spread of the disease, which is always more or less prevalent in Pekin; and I was not sorry we had taken the precaution of being vaccinated in Shanghai.

All susceptibility and refinement must be cast aside when walking in the streets of Pekin. I could not attempt to describe one quarter of the disgusting sights and outrages on decency that continually met the eye in this unfragrant city, even in broad daylight. I was not surprised to hear that no European resident ever dreams of walking about the streets of the capital if he can possibly avoid it. No lady could possibly do so. As any one who has ever visited it must know, there

exists no dirtier city in the world than Pekin, no filthier individual, both morally and physically, than the Pekinite. Cleanliness and decency are words unknown in his vocabulary. As for washing, he never dreams of it. In winter he puts on five or six layers of clothes, taking them off by degrees as the weather gets warmer, until he is reduced to the white linen shirt and trousers that he wore the preceding summer. With the approach of the cold weather he gradually resumes his winter garb.

Being provided with letters of introduction to the British and Russian ministers, we made our way to the former legation the morning after our arrival. With the exception of Belgium, whose minister had been recalled about two months before we arrived, nearly every nation in the world has its representative at Pekin. The English Embassy is a perfect palace and stands apart from the other legations on the banks of the Grand Imperial Canal, a stream once fringed by handsome stone banks or quays, which, like everything else in Pekin, have long fallen into ruin and decay. The half-dry canal now presents more the appearance of a dirty ditch of stagnant water than what it once was, an important waterway.

It was quite a relief to get out of the dusty, ill-smelling street, as passing a smart, white-clad English sentry, we entered the cool, shady grounds of the Embassy. The building was formerly the palace of the Duke Liang (a relation of the former Emperor), but was ceded to the British after the campaign of 1860. Probably in no other part of the world does the English Government possess a representative building so thoroughly typical of the country it is in. The pavilions of Chinese architecture, intricate carvings of roof and cornice, vermilion and gold pillars that form the entrance contrasted strangely with the interior where the cool, dimly-lit rooms, fresh with the scent of flowers and replete with every European luxury and comfort, bore witness to the good taste and refinement of the charming "Ambassadrice," who, fresh from Paris, and clad in one of Worth's *chefs-d'œuvre*, looked strangely out of place in dirty, dusty, semi-savage Pekin!

"You will never," said Sir John W——, "get through to Kiakhta without an interpreter. I could not allow you to attempt it, so I fear you must make up your minds to remain in Pekin for at least a week. By that time I shall have got

you your Chinese passports, and I hope an interpreter to accompany you as far as the Russian frontier. I must tell you that it is not easy, for the Chinese have an unaccountable aversion to crossing the desert of Gobi."

Our next visit was to the Russian minister, M. Coumany, to whom we had letters of introduction from M. de Staal, the Russian minister in London. He was (as are most Russians) kindness itself, but met us with the invariable question, "Why Siberia?" The picture M. Coumany drew of the overland journey was certainly not pleasant or encouraging. "Here are letters," said he, "for the commissioner of Kiakhta and governors of Tomsk and Nijni Novgorod. General Ignatieff of Irkoutsk is now away on leave. But let me ask you to think twice before attempting this voyage. You will experience nothing but annoyance and privation, the whole way to Nijni Novgorod. You will find the monotony and fatigue almost unbearable,—and with Japan so close!" he added, using the well-known formula.

But we managed to convince our host, before leaving, that nothing would deter us from at least making the attempt to reach Moscow by land.

"Like all Englishmen," he said, smiling, "you are obstinate; and as you are determined to go, let me give you a word of advice: Get off as soon as you can, and out of Asia by October at latest. Siberia in autumn is a hell upon earth."

We returned to our hotel somewhat discouraged, for we had hoped that three or four days at the most would suffice for our preparations. However, there was no help for it, so to lose no time we set about getting mules and litters for the four days' journey to the Great Wall, the first stage of our voyage, and trusted to Providence that "the Boy" (as every Chinese servant from eighteen to eighty is called in China) would arrive in a week or ten days at the latest.

There is much to do and see in Pekin, but the heat, dust and smells detract considerably from the pleasures of a walk through the city. Moreover, the Chinese, since their Tonquinese victories have become so arrogant and insolent that many of the most interesting temples are now closed to Europeans. Our favourite walk was on the summit of the outer wall, where one could enjoy the cool evening breeze out of the dust and stenches for a while. The Tartar or outer wall is a wonderful

piece of masonry about sixty feet high by as many broad, and, considering the hundreds of years it has braved wind and weather, in a wonderful state of repair. It is moss-grown on the summit, and the wild tangled herbage grows knee deep. Were it not for the conservatism, to use no stronger term, of the Chinese Government it would make a splendid drive or ride, for it extends unbroken and in an excellent state of repair for upwards of twenty-two miles. To show the jealousy of this strange race, a European minister at Pekin once remarked to a mandarin what a pleasant drive it would make, adding that it was really the only place in Pekin where he could ever walk with any pleasure. "Oh! you walk there, do you?" was the reply, and the very next afternoon, on arriving for his daily constitutional, he found the gate closed, and an order posted forbidding all Europeans to ascend the wall. This order was, however, cancelled a year after, fortunately for us, and we enjoyed our evening strolls undisturbed, for we seldom saw a soul besides ourselves. It was pleasant enough here in the cool of the evening, out of the dust which on still days

hung over the great city like a huge funeral pall. When clear the view was lovely, the rugged, precipitous chain of hills in the background, the densely packed, dwarfish-looking dwellings, and rays of the setting sun flashing brightly on the green porcelain roofs and lofty pagodas of the temples, and bright yellow tiles of the Imperial Palace, composed a picture as unique as, on bright, clear evenings, it was beautiful. As a rule, however, the dust obscured everything.

There is an observatory on this wall which was erected as far back as A.D. 1279. In 1674 a Jesuit priest (one Father Verbest) superintended its restoration, and from that day to this it has remained intact. On a kind of platform above the level of the wall, and reached by an iron staircase, are a quantity of bronze instruments—sextants, globes, quadrants, &c., mounted on massively wrought stands representing strange birds and beasts. Of enormous size, and some from twelve to fourteen feet high and of immense weight, they looked a little distance off as if a single man could lift them, so beautiful and delicate is their moulding and workmanship, and though of great value, were left untouched when the

allies entered Pekin in 1860, probably by direction of the commanders-in-chief. It seemed strange that although they have stood in the open for so many hundred years, uncared for and uncleaned, they bore not the slightest traces of decay from time or weather—one especially, a huge globe of the heavens in bronze with the constellations thereon in gold and silver, looked as if it had been placed there but yesterday.

From the summit of the observatory one may look down into the Board of Examinations, a walled space of some eighty acres, with rows of queer-looking little boxes or cells for students. Competitive examinations for Government appointments are held here every three years, and so severe are the subjects that many of the candidates go mad. During the examinations, which last three days, no one is allowed to enter or leave the building. On one occasion two students died, but the doors were not opened. Their bodies were hoisted over the wall, and carried to the burial-ground by the friends awaiting them outside.

We occasionally returned from these expeditions along the pieces of waste land, sandy and sterile, which bound the city walls, and frequently came

upon groups or squads of Manchu soldiery at target practice with the bow and arrow. The men are fine strapping fellows and well set up, but their weapons wretched, clumsy things, carrying barely thirty yards. The greater portion of the Chinese army consists of these Manchu Tartars. A force of eighty thousand quartered in Manchuria under the command of Germans, forms the backbone of the Chinese army, and consists of cavalry, artillery, and infantry, the latter armed with the new Berdan rifle. Nearly the whole of the remainder of the Imperial army use the old bow and arrow of their ancestors, and I do not think I exaggerate when I say that there is not a rifle among the soldiery in Pekin.

The Chinese are, indeed, a strange and unaccountable race. It is hard to credit that a nation possessing ironclads and the latest improvements in light and heavy guns at the mouth of the Peiho river still clothes its soldiers at the capital in tiger-skins, and instructs them in the art of making faces to frighten the enemy.[1] Clever and civilized as he is in many things, the Chinaman's forte clearly does not

[1] A fact.

lie in firearms. A German officer of one of the Imperial gunboats told me that a consignment of three hundred Martini-Henry rifles was one day received on board his ship, with one hundred rounds of ammunition to each. A short time after, returning from a week's leave, he found that by order of the Chinese commander they had all been thrown overboard. The ammunition was exhausted, argued the latter, what was the use of keeping the rifles!

We made but two excursions into the city itself the whole time we remained in Pekin, and after the first time on foot. I only rode in a Pekin cab once. They are not pretty conveyances to look at, being a sort of box, four feet long by three feet broad, fastened to two long poles or beams, and supported by a pair of clumsy ponderous wooden wheels in iron tires. The roof is of thick dark blue cloth, with two little gauze-covered windows on either side. Most of them are drawn by mules, an animal which is looked upon in Pekin as of far greater value than a horse or pony, and fetches far higher prices. I do not think I have ever seen finer mules, even in Spain, than in North China.

To describe the celestial capital is not diffi-

cult. One street is so exactly like another, that when you have seen a bit of the place you have seen the whole of it. The principal street of the Tartar city may be described in very few words. A broad straggling thoroughfare, knee deep in dust, with low, tumble-down houses on either side, hidden at intervals by dirty canvas booths, wherein fortune-tellers, sellers of sweetmeats, keepers of gambling-hells, and jugglers ply their trade. Deep open cesspools at every fifty yards; crowds of dirty, half-naked men and painted women; mandarins and palanquins preceded by gaudily-clad soldiers on horseback and followed by a yelling rabble of men and boys, armed with flags, spears, and sticks, on foot; Tartar ladies in mule litters, hung with bells and bright cloths; dark, savage-looking Mongolians from the desert, leading caravans of camels; Chinamen in grey, green, or heliotrope silk, Chinamen in rags, and Chinamen in nothing at all; water-carriers, soldiers, porters, sellers of fruit and ice, the latter coated with dust, like everything else, and looking singularly uninviting; Chow-chow and sweetmeat sellers; camels, mules, ponies, oxen carts thronging the ruined roadway; a deafening noise of bells, cymbals,

shouting and cursing; indecency and filth everywhere, with a dusty, gloomy glare over everything, even on the brightest day, while the air everywhere around is poisoned with the hot, sickly smell peculiar to Pekin. Such was the impression one usually retained of a walk through the capital on a summer's day. We saw many curious sights, but most were of such a nature that I cannot describe them. A Chinese funeral we passed one day is perhaps worth mention. An enormous procession, nearly a mile long, bore witness to the fact that the deceased was a man of some rank. A number of relations clad in white (Chinese mourning), preceded the catafalque, strewing flowers and burning incense before it. Every hundred yards or so a halt was made, and a huge white sheet spread upon the ground on which the mourners lay flat on their breasts and stomachs, repeatedly beating their heads against the ground. Immediately in front of the coffin was the deceased's property, his horse, hat, pipe, &c., and sedan. The latter startled one somewhat, for seated in it was a figure which, on closer inspection, we discovered to be a waxen effigy of the dead man himself, clad in the

clothes he had worn just before death. The huge oaken coffin was so heavy that it took sixty or seventy men to carry it. At the end of the procession of relatives and friends came the rabble and "followers" of the deceased. The Chinese custom is to set the coffin down on reaching the burial-ground with a light layer of earth over it till the wood begins to rot. It is then covered thickly with earth, but not buried. The dead in China are never put underground.

The quieter and less frequented streets of the city were not so bad; narrow, unpaved byways fringed on either side with high white walls of brick and plaster, enclosing the houses of well-to-do merchants, or the better class of tradesmen; quaint little dwellings, curiously carved and gorgeous with blue, vermilion, and gold façades, having neat flower-gardens in front, and willow-fringed ponds. One occasionally caught a glimpse, through an open porch, of the proprietor, his day's work over, clad in a light and airy costume consisting of a pair of drawers, lazily watching the gold fish in the clear lily-covered water, or studying his *Pekin Gazette*, the oldest daily paper, by the way, in existence. Occasionally Madame was visible

sharing the joys of her lord and master's leisure-hours, but not often; for when you visit a Chinaman he seldom presents you to his wife, although the latter is not kept at all secluded or under lock and key. A Chinese woman has as much liberty as an English one, maritally speaking, though, as I have said, one does not often meet them. Most are said to make very good wives; unlike most eastern and other nations, they have not the love of intrigue so inherent as a rule in the female sex. A Chinaman may have, if he will, one hundred concubines, but only one wife, who is the ruler and head of his household.

One is much struck with the good looks of the Pekin women when compared with those of Southern China. Those most frequently met with are Tartars, who do not, as a rule, contract and deform their feet. It is only in the Chinese city that one meets poor creatures rolling about the streets with their arms extended, like ships in distress. In some parts of China a bride's value is reckoned by the smallness of her foot. The operation of contracting it, which is performed in early youth, is not painful. Four of the toes are bent under the sole of the foot, to which they are firmly

pressed, and to which they grow together, the great toe being left in its natural state. The fore part of the foot is then compressed with strong bandages so that it snoots upwards and appears like a large lump at the instep, where it forms as it were part of the leg. The lower part of the foot is sometimes not more than four inches long by one inch broad! This practice is, however, said to be dying out, even among the Chinese.

The ornament of which the Celestial is so proud, his pigtail, was in reality introduced into China by the Tartars, who as Mahometans tried to force the Koran on to the whole of China at the commencement of their Dynasty. To this the Chinese would not submit, but an edict was promulgated by the first Tartar ruler that every subject should shave his head in Mahometan fashion, leaving only the small tuft of hair by which the Faithful are supposed to be drawn up to Heaven when they die. The Chinese, artistic in all they do, converted the ridiculous and shaggy tuft of hair into a thick tail, the careful plaiting of which is now the Chinaman's greatest delight and pride. It is, moreover, a very suitable head-dress for Pekin. We found brushing the head even twice a day quite useless,

for the hair was thick with dust ten minutes after the operation.

The coinage current in Pekin is to a stranger more than confusing, consisting as it does of "cash" and bar silver. With the former, small coins of which about fifty go to a halfpenny, one has little to do. A hole is stamped through the middle for greater convenience, and one frequently sees in Pekin two or three necklaces of these worthless, but weighty, pieces slung round a man's neck, who is struggling along under the value of perhaps eightpence or ninepence, English money. The silver is in bars, and cut off as wanted. The *tael* is not a coin, but a weight of silver made up in paper packets of one, three, or four taels. A mint has, I believe, been opened in Pekin since our visit, and a proper coinage will be issued in a few months—no small advantage to future visitors, for the difficulty of obtaining "change" at present is somewhat great.

It is curious how little attention a European attracts when walking in the streets of Pekin. Although there are many probably in that great city who have never seen a white face, they evinced but little curiosity when we visited the

gambling-hells, opium-shops, and other dens of a like description, and we passed through them unmolested, if not unobserved. Here and there in the lower quarters of the capital, however, the natives evidently preferred our room to our company. The words "Yang Qweitze" fell with uncomfortable frequency upon the ear, and on one occasion a shower of stones and mud hastened our retreat from a house in the slums which our guide had imprudently allowed us to enter and take stock of. As a general rule, however, the natives were civil and obliging enough, and in the more aristocratic eating and tea-houses we were frequently invited to partake of a cup of tea free gratis by the proprietor.

The "Jeunesse Dorée" of Pekin are gay dogs. Theatres, restaurants, and tea-houses abound, and the more populous quarters of the city are alive with revelry, not to say riot, till four or five o'clock a.m. A good deal more champagne and other alcoholic liquors are consumed than the cup that is popularly supposed to cheer without inebriating. Intoxication is a vice to which the Chinese masher (if I may so call him) is particularly prone, although a very wrong impres-

sion exists in Europe as to the disgusting animal food Chinamen are said to be in the habit of eating. Cats, dogs, and even rats are, by many in England, supposed to be devoured promiscuously, but this is not the case. Dogs and rats are eaten, no doubt; in fact I have myself seen the dishes in question, and very good they looked! But it must be remembered that the rats are fed solely on farinaceous food, and carefully brought up by hand. They are in reality far cleaner than our domesticated English pig. The "chow" dog is a race of itself, and the only one ever eaten by the better classes. The lower orders of course have to put up with what they can get. A good dog or rat is as expensive a luxury in Pekin as venison or turtle at home!

Strong drink leads to high play, and gambling in various forms is much in vogue among the gilded youth of Pekin. Cards are the general mode, but a sport at which enormous sums are won and lost is cricket-fighting. The greatest care is lavished on these little animals, and large sums of money paid for them. The trainers are brought up to the profession, and, strange as it may seem, a good cricket in Pekin is almost as valuable to his owner as a useful racehorse in England.

The insects are fought in little boxes like miniature rat pits. There is sometimes intense excitement for weeks before an event in which two well-known crickets are to compete. Game-cocks, pigeons, and even quail are also fought, but the most popular sport is undoubtedly cricket-fighting. It is probably also the most ancient of them all.

We strolled into a doctor's shop one evening in the slums—a dirty, gloomy little den—its grimy walls covered with phials of strange shapes and cruel-looking instruments, while suspended from the ceiling hung a number of dried reptiles and animals which looked weird and uncanny in the dim, uncertain light. In a dark recess, and almost invisible in the gloom, sat the doctor, a large book before him, his wizened old face just visible in the rays of a flickering oil wick at his side. It reminded one of the first act in "Faust," and one instinctively looked around for Mephistopheles. Though our guide informed us that this was one of the most successful physicians in Pekin, his practice did not seem extensive. I procured with difficulty the following Chinese prescription, though for what ailment it is intended I am ignorant :—

Decoction of centipedes, one frog and three cock-

roaches, ten grains calomel, three grains morphia, fifteen grains quinine!

Alas! for the poor patient who had to swallow it. Surely the deadliest disease would be preferable to a mixture of cockroach and calomel!

Most of our waste time in Pekin (and we had plenty) was spent in the numerous porcelain shops with which the city abounds. It was curious to walk out of the squalid, filthy streets, knee-deep in dust and reeking with sewage, into the cool, luxurious rooms with their tesselated pavements, fountains, and flowers, and hundreds of pounds' worth of beautiful wares laid out invitingly before one in *cloisonné*, jade, and porcelain. We found it hopeless as a rule, to think of getting anything at a reasonable price. Japan itself can produce nothing so beautiful and graceful as true Pekin work, though, like everything else, it is imitated, and there has been, of late years, a quantity of worthless trash in the market. Like most eastern nations, the dealers "see a European coming" and raise their prices accordingly. Unfortunately also, unlike other eastern nations, they steadily refuse to lower them, bargain he never so wisely. It made one's mouth water to look round the shelves of one of

these shops, groaning with thousands of pounds' worth of treasure in porcelain and jade, and to think of the looting of the Summer Palace in 1860.

I had always imagined the latter to be a building of Chinese architecture, a great rambling place all domes, towers, and pagodas, but found it more like a very perfect imitation, in miniature, of the Tuileries. The morning of our visit one might have been standing on the banks of the Seine and looking on the charred and blackened ruins of Napoleon's beautiful palace after the fatal September, 1870, had not the red and yellow temples dotted at intervals round the sunlit plains, and Chinese character of the landscape recalled us to a sense of the situation, and reminded us of the distance we were from Fair France! Anything less Chinese than the architecture of the Summer Palace I never saw. It is in pure French style and was designed by Jesuits at a time when they were more popular in China than at present. Standing in the midst of such picturesque scenery, surrounded by such beautiful gardens, park, woodland, and lakes, it seems a sin to have ever destroyed a building which, with its characteristic indolence, the Imperial Government

has never attempted to restore. There it stands just as the allies left it in 1860, even to the very names scrawled by Tommy Atkins and the French "Piou-Pious" on its smoke-blackened walls and terraces, and embellished here and there with verses, the work of some French or English canteen poet, containing language more forcible than polite as to the ways and customs of John Chinaman. To say nothing of the enormous value of the *objets-d'art* and furniture, over 32,000*l.* in solid ingots of gold were found at the looting of the Palace, and a quantity of valuable china and porcelain *cloisonné* wantonly destroyed and left on the spot by the troops. The Emperor in those days was a liberal and merry monarch. The Summer Palace was before the war more like a miniature Compiègne than anything else, with its theatricals, hunting-parties, concerts, and revelry of other and less sober kinds, in which the Emperor himself used freely to join; a very different existence to that led by his harassed and melancholy descendant of the present day.

The now reigning sovereign, "Kwang-Su," is eighteen years of age, and by the time these pages are in print will have taken unto himself a wife, or rather one will have been taken for him by his

aunt the Queen Regent who, though her nephew has come to years of discretion, has even now a good deal more to do with the management of affairs than the Emperor. She is an arbitrary, ambitious woman, and, rumour has it, knows considerably more about the death of the late Emperor than she cares to own. "Kwang-Su," cannot, like the Pope, be said to lead a happy life. As a matter of fact, it is literally not his own. Everything must be done by rule and under supervision of the court officials, even to eating and sleeping. The poor boy gets little of the latter luxury, as frequent cabinet councils are held at four in the morning, the Chinese ministers averring that the head is clearer at that hour of the day than at any other. I hardly think this plan would always succeed in Europe.

One can scarcely wonder that "Kwang-Su" is ill-tempered, morose, and subject to fits of passion, during which he defies his aunt, destroys everything within his reach, and declares he will not be Emperor, but will escape and go and work in the fields, anything rather than be shut up like a dog in the Forbidden City. And truly it must be a wretched existence. Every day is planned out beforehand. Not a detail is omitted, even to the very clothes he wears. It must be more than annoying

to be given, say a mutton chop, when one particularly wants a beefsteak, champagne when you know it disagrees with you, and you much prefer claret, or a thin suit of clothes when you feel cold and require a thick one. The Emperor's studies take up about nine hours of the day. His great joke when we were at Pekin, was to beg his tutors, the constant relays of whom annoyed him to desperation, to let him look at their watches. No sooner were they handed to him, than they were violently dashed on the ground and stamped upon. By this means, Kwang-Su argued, they would not know what time to come another day. Since his Majesty's new "game," however, most of the professors sent to Shanghai for Waterbury watches. Gold and silver ones became expensive.

Riding or walking, hunting in the green fields and shady forests, or fishing in the blue willow-fringed lakes of the Forbidden City, although as far removed from the turmoil and foul smells of Pekin as the desert of Gobi itself, the Emperor is never alone. There is always a retinue following him to tell him what to do and when to do it: to remind him, for instance, when at four o'clock he is enjoying his favourite pastime of fishing, and has forgotten for a brief period

the carking cares of monarchy, that at 4.15 he must abandon the pursuit for a deer-hunt, or a walk (always accompanied by a suite), in a specified part of the grounds of the city. The latter must be a curious place, for the eye of the white barbarian is never allowed to look within its walls, save when, at very rare intervals, the European ministers are admitted to audience in a particular part of the palace.

It was in 1873 that the Great Audience question was finally settled to the satisfaction of all the European powers, and their representatives presented to the Emperor "Tung Che" in the European manner. It had been argued ever since the mission of Lord Amherst in 1814, and unsuccessfully. On that occasion the envoy returned without seeing the Emperor, the latter insisting that he could only do so on condition that he prostrated himself, but this, as the king of England's representative, Lord Amherst declined to do, and returned to England.

Even at the present time audiences are extremely rare, and only occur, if at all, on the most important occasions. Even the Duke of Edinburgh, when he visited Pekin in 1869, was refused one. The Chinese ministers themselves are not allowed to approach the imperial presence nearer than a distance of about sixty or seventy yards.

The Emperor sits at the end of a long, narrow, funnel-like passage, while his ministers prostrate themselves in a small apartment at the end of it. The Empress Regent is still more unapproachable, for when she holds a reception, it is from behind a large screen. On one occasion she became so excited during an argument, that her head appeared over the top, and the ministers were able to gaze (if for an instant only) on the sacred features. The Emperor is the sole male inmate of the Forbidden City, a gigantic harem, beside which even the seraglios of Stamboul pale into insignificance, for the moon's cousin is surrounded within his golden tiled walls by a population of no less than three thousand women and eunuchs.

Kwang-Su has very little notion of what his capital is like. When he is taken for a drive, it means weeks of careful preparation, the sums of money devoted to patching up the streets through which he passes are fabulous. Were one half of the millions which are supposed to be expended on the keeping in order of the city honestly laid out, Pekin would be a very different place to what it is. But so long as the filching and robbery carried on by the mandarins and others in office continue, the Chinese capital must always remain the dirty dust-

heap it now is. A case in point came under my notice while in Pekin, and is one illustration of the enormous sums that yearly find their way into the pockets of the mandarins. A drain had to be built from the French Embassy to the Imperial canal, a distance of about three hundred yards. For this the Government was charged twenty-three thousand taels, the European contractor being paid three thousand five hundred taels. The mandarins pocketed the balance!

When Kwang Su takes an airing all European residents are warned by their ministers to remain within doors, or at any rate away from that part of the city through which the Emperor is to pass, and the most stringent precautions are taken that no man, European or native, may look upon the features of the sovereign. The doors and windows of the houses are closed, and rich silks and tapestries hung from their walls, the streets are carefully swept and watered, every hole carefully filled up, every scrap of litter or offal carried away far from where, at a stated hour, and punctual to the moment, the royal train rolls slowly along through the empty, deserted streets. The Emperor must, therefore, have very different ideas of Pekin from the ordinary run of mankind. Save for the dust, which is of course unavoidable, it

must seem a fair place enough to Kwang-Su. Could he but see it as we did, I doubt if he would ever again wish to leave the palaces and gardens, the deer-parks and lakes of his beautiful prison.

The preliminaries for Kwang-Su's nuptials were being carried out when we were at Pekin. They are curious enough. The bridegroom is, or ought to be, the chief party concerned in the choosing of a wife; not so the wretched Kwang-Su. The sharer of his joys and sorrows is chosen by the Empress Regent out of some three hundred or four hundred girls (daughters of mandarins and others of high position), sent up to Pekin from all parts of China for the purpose. Nor is the Emperor allowed to see his *fiancée's* face even for a moment till the evening of the wedding day. Though the Emperor is allowed but one actual wife, he can make his choice and select as few or many concubines as he pleases, four hundred or five hundred of the latter being sent to the capital on the occasion of an Imperial marriage. The majority of them are women of low birth, though some of the higher officials who wish to curry favour at court also occasionally send their daughters.

It seems scarcely probable that China will become civilized for many, many years to come, as long

as the Emperor and his ministers continue to set their faces against improvement of any kind, especially if it be what they regard as an innovation of the "foreign devils." For instance: a company was formed a few years since to construct a railway from Tientsin to the capital—a line which would have enormously improved and benefited the trade of the latter, but the Government would not hear of its construction. Permission was, however, granted to carry a line from Shanghai to Woosung on the Yantzekiang river in 1877, an enterprise which under European management, succeeded admirably till when one fine day, not a year after its completion, an order came down from Pekin for its immediate removal—and this command the unfortunate share-holders were of course compelled to comply with.

The Emperor's father was lately induced to make a trip to Tientsin at the invitation of the European merchants living there. It was hoped that seeing something of the outside world might open his eyes to the foolish and lamentable practices of the Imperial Court. Every honour was shown him—a salute fired from the French and English gunboats. Balls, parties, receptions, dinners were given—

everything in short, that money could buy was procured to *fête* him, and it was confidently hoped, so agreeable and pleasant did he make himself, that his week's visit would send him back to Pekin a wiser man —also that some of this wisdom would be imparted to his son the Emperor. But it was all in vain. All he did on his return to the capital was to set to work and write a number of satirical poems in Chinese, descriptive of his trip, and anything but complimentary to his hosts, the White Barbarians. These poems were published, and had an enormous sale in Pekin.

The long sunny days dragged wearily by. A week, a fortnight elapsed, and still no boy. Our passports for China and Mongolia were in order, mules and litters procured for the journey to the Great Wall—everything in readiness for a start, which, however, Sir John W. would not hear of our making without an interpreter. It was tedious work waiting. We seldom left the hotel after the first week, except to dine at the Embassy, or spend the afternoon in its cool, shady grounds, where one could while away the weary hours with books and papers from the well-stocked library. We did not often dine out, but when we did, pre-

ferred ploughing through the dust or mire, on foot, to going in a Pekin cab, a circumstance our neighbours at dinner ought to have been grateful for, for these vehicles are crawling with vermin. It was necessary to take lamps on these occasions, for the less frequented streets of the city are unlit, and to be well armed with thick sticks for protection against the dogs, whose name is legion, and who prowl about the city at night in large numbers in search of food. Although of great size, they are mangy, wretched-looking creatures. In gangs they are dangerous, and frequently attack solitary and unarmed wayfarers; but, like the Turks at Constantinople, the Pekinese do not harm them, for they are capital scavengers, though the din they make at night is very trying to a nervous constitution, and sleep in Pekin for the first two or three nights is an impossibility.

I have said much against Pekin in this chapter, enough, perhaps, to deter the reader from ever wishing to pay it a visit. I must at the same time give it its due, for it is undoubtedly exempt from many of the pests and annoyances of other Eastern cities. There are no mosquitoes to speak of, nor sand-flies, nor does that most irritating plague of all, the

common fly, torment you day and night as it does in other hot climates. Indeed, it is not, on the whole, such a bad residence for Europeans as many places I could name in India and other parts of the East. The life is, of course, frightfully monotonous during the summer months, when those connected with the Legations who can spare the time betake themselves to the hills, some fifteen miles distant, where some old temples have been fitted up to form rough though comfortable summer retreats for those who are compelled to inhabit the dusty, stench-ridden capital in the hot season.

The European population of Pekin is, as I have said, a very small one, probably not more than sixty or seventy in all. It consists exclusively of the various Legations, Missionary Houses and College. There is but one mercantile establishment: the agency of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank.

In winter there are many worse places in the world than this. It is only then, indeed, that the European community ever make any effort to rouse themselves. Sleighing and skating-parties, lawn tennis, by day—and theatricals, dances, and dinner-parties by night, are the order of the day.

Pekin is fairly healthy, even in summer, for

A STREET IN TARTAR CITY—PEKIN.

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Europeans, except for those inclined to be nervous. In such cases the extremely rarified atmosphere often precludes sleep and induces insomnia and other nervous diseases. The sun, too, is more dangerous here than in any place (including Borneo) that I have ever visited in the East. It knocks you over in a second, and deaths from sunstroke, even among the natives, are frequent.

Living in Pekin though dear is excellent, and our host gave us little dinners that would not have disgraced a Paris restaurant. Although not manufactured, that greatest luxury of the East, ice, is cheap and abundant. It is cut (out of the canals) in winter in huge blocks and stored in early spring in large caves just outside the city walls. Fresh fruit is also stored and preserved in the same manner, and I have eaten a bunch of grapes in the month of July that had been stored the previous October as fresh as if they had just been cut from the vine.

We resolved, after a weary fortnight of waiting, to take matters more philosophically. It was useless chafing and worrying, either the boy would come or he wouldn't. "Tout vient à point à celui qui 'sait' attendre," was a proverb we were always quoting

Though advised not to attempt it, we resolved to ride as much as possible across the Gobi Desert. We had not yet seen a camel cart, but had heard quite enough of its miseries to determine us never to occupy it longer at a time than was absolutely necessary. So having taken the trouble to bring saddles out with us, we resolved to chance the loss of the ponies, and managed to get two strong wiry-looking Mongolian ones, about fourteen hands high, for 8*l.* English apiece. We tried many before pitching on the right sort. Lancaster's first attempt at a purchase was not a lucky one. The brute lay on its side the moment he mounted, and resolutely refused to move, much to the delight of the crowd who had assembled to see what the "Yang Qweitze" were about. However, after many and varied experiences he managed to pick up a smart-looking bay pony only four years old. Mine was considerably older, but they were both sturdy, plucky little beasts; looked up to any amount of fatigue—and as we afterwards found by no means belied their appearance.

Our host rushed in one bright sunny morning with a beaming countenance, before we were out of bed. "Courage, messieurs, your boy has arrived,"

at the same time handing me a blue envelope containing a note from the Embassy. "Boy will arrive to-day from Tientsin." This was welcome news indeed, and I turned round for another snooze with a blessed feeling of relief and gratitude. All would now be well. To-morrow morning would see us *en route* for the Great Wall. We had saved, by the skin of our teeth, detention in Siberia. With any luck November would see us in Moscow.

At 5.30 "the boy" arrived; a tall, forbidding-looking Chinaman, with a sullen, hang-dog expression that inspired but little confidence. I saw in five minutes the kind of gentleman we had to deal with. Sulky, obstinate, and as sly as a fox, with a shifty, restless eye that could not look you in the face for two seconds together.

"Well, so you've come at last! What has kept you so long at Tientsin?"

"Jubilee!"

The bare idea of this human scarecrow assisting at a festival of any sort was too funny. But I knew the man lied.

"Will you come with us to Kiakhta?"

"All depend what get. No can go for less than

$300. If no take me, master get no one. All afraid go desert. Afraid Mongol man."

The insolent, swaggering tone of the man annoyed, nearly as much as the exorbitant price he asked surprised, me. I knew it was out of all reason. But the wretch was well aware of our helpless position, and all my hopes of a speedy start for the desert sank below zero. To give the price he named would have been not only absurd but fatal. We should have been mercilessly swindled at every village we came to, if not attacked by robbers, when the news of our liberality and wealth became known, as things do in China in an incredibly short space of time. We had besides this reason, a far better one: we could not afford it.

"It is for you to accept an offer, not for you to make one," I replied, placing $6 on the table. "Now listen. Here are $6 for your fare back to Tientsin if you do not come to my terms; and you must decide *at once*. I will give you exactly $120, and not one cash more, to accompany us to Kiakhta and find your own way back. Accept or refuse; and if the latter, make yourself scarce, for I shall not change my mind."

My sulky friend's only reply was to carelessly

take up the money, pocket it, and without another word calmly leave the room. I watched him slink slowly down the little courtyard and out of the gate, half hoping he would think better of it; but no! He never even once looked behind him, and as I watched his tall, gaunt form vanish slowly in the dusk, I felt that now, indeed, our last hope was gone, and retiring to my room, threw myself on the bed in despair, and wondered what on earth we were going to do next.

To reach Siberia by way of the Gobi Desert was obviously impossible, for, judging by past experience, we could not reasonably expect to find another English-speaking boy, under another month or so. It would then be too late to attempt the journey *viâ* Mongolia, that is, without risking imprisonment of a couple of months in some lonely Siberian village—hardly a pleasant prospect, judging from all we had heard of that melancholy country.

There was now but one course to pursue—to return to Tientsin, and embark thence on the first vessel for Nicolaiefsk at the mouth of the Amour River, thus altogether avoiding the Mongolian desert, and gaining Irkoutsk by way of Khabarofka, Stratensk, and Chita, instead of Urga and Kiakhta.

It was a great disappointment. We had looked forward to the desert journey far more than to any other part of the voyage. There would have been some novelty and excitement in crossing the wild desolate plains lying between the Great Wall of China and Siberia, but none whatever in the cut-and-dried route from Nicolaiefsk, from which port a comfortable and well-found steamer takes the traveller a distance of about fifteen hundred miles up the Amour river to Stratensk. From here he proceeds by tarantass or sleigh (according to season) to Verchui Udinsk and across Lake Baikal (by steamer if in summer) to Irkoutsk, which city is distant about one thousand odd versts from Stratensk. There is but one main post-road across Siberia from Irkoutsk to Tomsk. But the come down from a journey in a camel caravan across the great Gobi Desert to an ordinary steamer and posting carriage along a dull, uninteresting river and monotonous road with a post-house every twenty versts,[1] was a severe blow to one's feelings and anticipations.

Dinner that night was a sad meal; even the

[1] A verst is about three-quarters of a mile.

champagne, which our host insisted upon producing, failed to enliven it. Our party was increased by three Russians from Shanghai, who were on their way to Manchuria for a month's shooting. One of them had done the Amour journey, and devoutly hoped he might never have to do it again. For monotony and lack of interest that great river was (according to his account) unrivalled. But we had made up our minds, and it must be done. Fortunately enough, a vessel would be leaving Tientsin for Nicolaiefsk in four or five days' time, which would give us plenty of time to retrace our steps to Tientsin and embark. To bemoan one's fate under such circumstances is worse than useless, and we retired to rest resigned, if not cheerful. The Gobi was impossible, "*Vogue pour 'l'amour'!*"

But the proverb that it is ever "darkest before dawn," was exemplified next morning when, about ten o'clock, and on the eve of departure for Tientsin, the welcome news was brought us that a boy had been found! and by whom but our good angel, M. Tallien, who, moved to compassion by our woe-begone faces the previous evening, had himself searched Pekin high and low, and run

the article to earth within the very walls of the Russian Embassy. No ordinary "boy" was this either, but an excellent cook, speaking English, Russian, and Mongolian fluently, and who, best of all, was willing to go to Kiakhta and find his own way back again for $100 all found. I could have fallen into Tallien's arms and embraced him. Perhaps, being a Frenchman, he would have taken such a proceeding as a matter of course.

Our new acquisition, Jee Boo by name, a nice, quiet-looking fellow of about 30, had been cook and servant to Prince ——, one of the Russian *attachés*, for some time. Under ordinary circumstances we should perhaps have asked for his character, but dreading another delay we determined to chance it, take him as he was, and ask no questions. We were armed and he was not, which is always satisfactory in case of a disagreement. He was, at any rate, a very different stamp of man to our Tientsin friend, who, it now appeared, had taken the trouble to find him out and advise him to have nothing to do with us, for if he did he would never get paid. We should be sure to repudiate our debt on arrival at Kiakhta and leave

him stranded in a foreign land without friends or money. That was why he had himself refused to entertain our offer, &c., &c.

We soon convinced Jee Boo, however, of the honesty of our intentions by making M. Tallien his banker for the amount of $80, the remaining $20 to be paid him on arrival at Kiakhta, with an additional $20 if he behaved himself. Having thus arranged things to everybody's satisfaction, we gave Jee Boo leave to absent himself for the day, and (not without misgivings of another disappointment) made preparations for a start at six the following morning.

The same afternoon, while we were busily engaged fixing our heavy baggage to the mule packs, two of the most extraordinary beings I ever beheld rode up to the hotel gate. Both might have been any age from nineteen to ninety, and were dressed in suits of loud tartan check (not unlike that worn by Jack Spraggon in that best of sporting novels "Soapy Sponge"), enormous pith sun-hats with long, flowing puggarees and green spectacles. We put them down at a glance for what they unmistakably were, "globe-trotters," sent out by their mammas (or mamma, for they were like as

two peas), to see the world and improve their mind (if they had any). How they had drifted to Pekin, goodness only knows. It is not a city much affected by the genus. The comforts are not up to their standard.

They had ridden from Tungchow under a burning sun and at full gallop, and their weedy, miserable-looking ponies looked ready to drop. The latter evidently only yearned (like the Irishman's horse), for a wall to lean up against and think, and looked almost as disconsolate as their riders, which is saying a good deal.

They stood for some time without making a remark. Then, dismounting slowly and cautiously, one of them approached Tallien, who was assisting us with the packs, and in a mild and quavering voice inquired if he was manager of the hotel; and on receiving a reply in the affirmative, if he and his friend could have a bedroom, and whether there were any objects of interest to be seen in the neighbourhood?

"The Great Wall of China, messieurs," replied Tallien; "but you'll find it rather a long ride in one day."

"Oh, never mind! we must go and see it. Can

you get us a guide at once? We have to be in Tientsin again the day after to-morrow, to sail for Japan."

It was only with the greatest difficulty that they were persuaded to defer their visit to "the Great Wall" till next day.

At dinner that evening, they were great on the subject of their travels; had been, they informed us, to Gibraltar, Malta, Port Said, Cairo, Suez, Aden, Colombo, Singapore, and Shanghai, giving us their impressions and ideas of each port, and the customs of its inhabitants, in a manner which, in more ways than one, was highly entertaining. They were now going to see the "Great Wall of China," because their mamma had written to say that the *Times* said there was none, and she was sure there was, because her grandfather (who was a sailor) had told her so, and he had seen it. Then they were going to Japan, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, and New York, then to Liverpool and then London; "and I don't think," said the elder of the two sadly and wearily, "we shall ever care to go abroad again!"

Judging from the ideas this youth formed of the countries he visited, one could not help thinking

he would not lose very much by this determination.

They were up and away next morning long before we were stirring, on the same wretched animals that had brought them from Tungchow, and with a guide of their own finding, a rascally Pekinese, who probably made a good thing out of them. Where the scamp took them remains a mystery. I have since heard, they returned the next day quite proud of their achievement, remarking at dinner that evening, that the "Wall was a fine sight." The fact that it is a long five-days' journey from the capital never occurred to them, and they left Pekin quite satisfied, having probably been shown the ramparts of some suburban town or village. I have often wondered since if they wrote to that long-suffering paper the *Times*.

It was past seven o'clock, and the sun was high in the heavens before we had completed our preparations, saddled the ponies, and packed the luggage and provisions into the litters. Our party consisted of but three mule-litters, and our two ponies. The heavy baggage had preceded us the day before, and we did not expect to come up with it till we reached Kalgan, the last

Chinese city on the borders of Mongolia. Two Chinese muleteers accompanied us, also Jee Boo, who bustled about and made himself generally useful in a way that augured well for the future.

A final *café au lait* and "chasse" with our host, who was almost as keen about the expedition as we were (indeed, where should we have been, had it not been for his timely aid ?), and we were ready to start. Early as it was, madame and her sister were at the gate to bid us farewell and wish us a prosperous journey. One could not help thinking, as one looked at their pretty French faces and neatly clad figures, how long it might be ere one would look upon their like again!

A few moments more and we had taken leave of our friends, and were riding down the narrow dusty street for the last time, half sorry (so perverse is man) to leave the place we had been for three long weeks moving heaven and earth to get away from. The feeling of regret did not last long, however, and before we had crossed the stone bridge over the Imperial canal no one would have recognized in us the despairing wretches of two days ago. We left Pekin a quarter of an hour later by the Anting Gate, and for the following three hours skirted

closely along the sandy plains that bound the city walls. Here we passed some three or four hundred camels, a caravan inward bound from the desert, going at a pace of about a mile and a half an hour. The Tartars in charge were all asleep, but the camels seemed to know their way; indeed the track here is pretty clearly laid down, being in the direct route to and from Kalgan. An hour later we had entered a fertile plain of millet, corn, and rye, interspersed with huge fields of pasture, and bounded on the horizon by a rugged, precipitous chain of hills, partly covered with forest, from which brightly coloured temples and pagodas stood out here and there in bright relief, glittering in the sunshine. All was life and animation; our very ponies seemed to rise in spirits, and plunged and danced about under the influence of the keen air and bright sunshine, to say nothing of the unusually large feeds of corn they had been given of late.

An hour later we stopped to look back across the emerald green plain to where, on the horizon, a thin brown line, faint and indistinct, broke the bright blue sky-line. We were looking our last on the walls of Pekin: the long land journey across Europe and Asia had commenced in real earnest.

CHAPTER III.

PEKIN TO KALGAN.

We had decided, upon leaving Pekin, to spend the greater part of the day in the sedans. The very name of this vehicle has a luxurious sound, and we looked forward to pleasant hours of travel at any rate as far as the Great Wall of China. But man is doomed to disappointment. For fatigue and discomfort, amounting at times to sheer physical pain, commend me to a Chinese mule litter, which is simply a kind of box or covered chair, hung on two long and slender poles. To it are harnessed, before and behind, two mules gaily caparisoned with feathers, highly-coloured trappings and bells. The latter, which keep up a loud and incessant jingle, are supposed to relieve the monotony of the journey. To the Chinese mind, perhaps, they do. The motion, to those not subject to sea-sickness, is not disagreeable, nor would it be tiring, had not the occupant to keep constantly in the same position, as

in a canoe or outrigger, for the slightest movement to the right or left overturns the whole concern. Also, should the leading mule fall, a not unfrequent occurrence, the passenger is almost certain to get a nasty fall; should the hind one make a false step, he finds himself helpless, with his feet in the air and at the mercy of the leader's heels, for the front and sides of the litter are open. With these trifling exceptions, the mule litters have no discomforts, always excepting the vermin that infest them.

We halted about two o'clock in the afternoon, at a wayside inn, on the banks of a clear pebbly stream. In front of the inn, under the shade of some willow-trees, were some twenty or thirty men and women, seated at marble tables, drinking tea and a kind of white compound, in which floated huge lumps of ice, out of pretty transparent porcelain cups. Curiosity prompted me to taste the latter, which I found simply delicious, and not unlike French "orgeat" or barley water. A troop of cavalry passed while we were discussing our frugal meal, a little way apart from the noisy, chattering crowd, who, after the usual inspection of our clothes and arms, left us in peace. On the arrival of the

soldiers, tall, swarthy fellows, clad in dark blue uniform, flat round hats, with streaming peacock feathers, and armed with rusty old flintlocks, we prepared to start without delay. We had been warned at Pekin and Shanghai against the Chinese military, had been told that they invariably insulted and sometimes outraged Europeans, when out of the protection of their legations. If so, these were a decided exception to the rule, for not only would they not hear of our proceeding on our journey till we had "chin-chind" with their officer, a cheery, nice-looking lad of eighteen or twenty, but as we left, all shook hands, Chinese fashion (clasping the hands and lifting them up and down in front of the breast), and gave us rendezvous at Kalgan, whither they, as well as we, were bound.

We were away again before four o'clock, by which time the heat had lessened and the fierce heat of the sun somewhat decreased in power. A ride of half an hour in the litters had convinced us that anything, even walking, was preferable to those cranky conveyances; though, thanks to our sturdy little steeds, we were never driven to take to Shank's mare. One of the pleasantest recollections I have retained of that weary journey is that of the little

beast who carried me so pluckily across a third of Asia! I verily believe, had it been a question of stamina and endurance, and not of time, I could have ridden him to Moscow in eight months, or even less. Good as "Karra"[1] was in other ways, he was not what is called a pleasant hack, having, like most Mongolian ponies, but two paces: a walk and a canter, or rather gallop, for the instant he broke into a canter he would take the bit in his teeth and bolt. It was sheer fun, however, for unlike most of his breed, he had not an atom of vice in his composition.

I have seldom seen lovelier scenery than we rode through that day. The dark wooded mountains in the distance standing out in striking contrast to the green plains of maize and barley, the clear sparkling streams, spanned by picturesque bridges glittering with enamel and porcelain. The park-like domain of some mandarin, fringed with belts of dark forest, and relieved by patches of light green sward, on which the deer and cattle were browsing, composed a very different picture to that with which we had always associated these so-called uncivilized regions. The country in North China is

[1] Mongol for black.

densely populated. The whole way from Pekin to Kalgan one was never out of sight of human beings. We must have ridden through at least twenty villages the first day—villages only in name—for each must have contained quite four or five thousand souls, though deserted when we passed through them, for the men and women were out at work in the fields and the narrow streets given up to dogs and naked children rolling about together promiscuously in the dusty roadway. It was only towards sunset that we passed through avenues of happy, contented-looking peasants, sitting at their doorways discussing tea and iced drinks, and dreaming the hours away till bed-time, after the heat and labour of the day. The agricultural labourer in China is better off than his European brother.

The natives evinced but little surprise at our appearance the first day. All seemed good tempered, friendly fellows, but (at the same time) not at all the kind of people to stand any nonsense. They were the finest-built men, physically speaking, I have ever seen, excepting perhaps in parts of European Russia.

Towards the latter part of our first day's journey, a great portion of the road or pathway was paved

with enormous blocks of granite in much the same way as that on the outskirts of Tungchow, and described in a former chapter. Here, however, it was in better repair—and presumably not so old—for the road in parts was as smooth and unbroken as asphalte. Bell, the traveller (1720), narrates that some eight hundred years since, a terrible earthquake occurred here and laid waste the whole of the country lying between Pekin and the Great Wall of China, occasioning great loss of life. It seems curious that no shocks of earthquake have ever been felt since in these latitudes, though they are of frequent occurrence in other parts of the Chinese Empire, as many as seven shocks having occurred at Shanghai alone in 1847.

It was past seven o'clock and nearly dark when we reached "Koo-ash," our first resting-place, a pretty Alpine-looking village nestling under a chain of hills, about four hundred feet high, bare of trees and vegetation, and composed of huge granite boulders. The heat of the day and fatigue of a ten hours' ride made the shelter of even a Chinese inn acceptable, though the stench of the place was awful, and the flies positively maddening. (The latter, though of the common household kind, were the

largest I have ever seen.) Floor and walls were black with them, and one crushed them as one turned on the stone slab that did duty for a bed. It may be as well to give the reader a brief description of the hostelry in which we took our first night's rest—for one native inn is precisely like another throughout the Chinese Empire. The inn at "Koo-ash" was, luckily for us, the best that exists on the road to the Great Wall. Had it been as bad as the one we reached the next night at "Kwi La Shaï," I verily believe we should have turned tail, and returned to Pekin without setting eyes upon that euphoniously named city. Coming, so to speak, into shallow water before we tried deep, saved us from ignominious defeat.

A Chinese inn, then, is usually constructed of dried mud, whitewashed, and built round three sides of an open courtyard, as a rule knee deep in filth and garbage, in which pigs, sheep, cows, and poultry roam about at leisure. An open cesspool usually occupies the centre. The buildings on the right and left are the kitchen, innkeeper's room, cart-shed, stables, &c., that at the farthest end, and facing you on entry, is that set apart for the guests. It is usually a bare dirty room, about eighteen feet by eighteen, a third

of which is separated by a bamboo screen or partition, four or five feet high, for more favoured guests who wish to be separated from the common herd. Sometimes the screen is dispensed with, and the partition made by a chalk mark on the floor! This cheerless apartment is devoid of furniture save for a "K'ang" or stove bed, a broad ledge of brick covered with matting. In winter a fire is lit under the "K'ang," which is built to accommodate ten to twelve sleepers. The flooring of the room is of uncarpeted brick, and there is no furniture of any kind. At Koo-ash, however, there were two inlaid chairs of the most delicate and beautiful workmanship I have ever seen. They would have fetched 50*l.* or 60*l.* in England. Most of these gruesome apartments swarm with rats, a circumstance that annoyed me more than all other discomforts put together, for I have always had a loathing for this animal. But I had not then been to Siberia.

We had our own food, of course. No European stomach could stand the *cuisine* in these parts. Tea was the only thing drinkable—sweet, washy stuff, as unlike our idea of that beverage as can well be, and drunk out of tiny cups holding about a couple of tablespoonsful. Our greatest difficulty

was to obtain permission to use the kitchen in these caravanserai to cook ourselves a tin of soup or preserved meat. It was somewhat disheartening to have to put up with a biscuit smeared over with a spoonful of jam after a hard day's work in the blazing sun—but this was often the case. There is no race in the world so obstinate as the northern Celestial; and in these parts, unlike in the south, even filthy lucre will not tempt them.

Still we had nothing to complain of on this score at Koo-ash. The proprietor, a big, burly Chinaman, clad in a pair of short white drawers (and nothing else), superintended our culinary arrangements himself, and turned us out a smoking dish of Irish stew in no time, served upon plates that would not have disgraced a dinner-table in the height of the London season. I tried to buy one of them, of transparent, violet porcelain of the most delicate tint imaginable. But mine host would not part with it on any consideration. It was an heirloom. "Drop it on the floor and break it," whispered Jee Boo. "He will sell it you then, and you can get it mended in England." I admired the astuteness of the Pekinite, but did not feel justified in risking the experiment. To say nothing of my

scruples, we were no longer within reach of English protection!

A couple of glasses of whisky and water revived the inner man, and we clambered into the "K'ang," where, in spite of the hardness of this novel kind of bed, we were soon in oblivion and back again in our dreams to less desolate regions. I was somewhat startled in the middle of the night by a dark, cold mass being thrust into my face until by the dim light of the moon struggling in through the paper window, I realized what the intruder was—a calf from the cattle-shed next door, who was making a nocturnal expedition in search of food. I lay awake the remainder of that night, for the enemy were upon me, and had evidently been for some hours, judging from the intense irritation and itching of my face and hands. Had it not been for them, however, I should have been equally wakeful; for the cheering spectacle of a couple of large rats disporting themselves on the further corner of the "K'ang" successfully murdered sleep till the morning.

Splendid weather favoured our journey. Though the heat at mid-day was intense, and the fierce sun compelled us to seek shelter in the litters, the

mornings and evenings were cool and delicious. We left Koo-ash the following day at five a.m. Our bill for the night was certainly not ruinous eighty cash, or something under 7*d.*, for the whole party.

The road ceases after leaving Koo-ash, and our way the second day lay through a succession of small paths or raised footways running in all directions through rice and cotton-fields. How the muleteers kept on the right track is a mystery to me, for there was apparently nothing to guide them. The paths or boundaries of the fields seemed to have been constructed with a view to leading wayfarers astray, like the maze at Hampton Court. There seemed to be no lack of water, the plains being cut up into squares of various sizes, and the water brought by means of small canals or ditches from the nearest stream or river. The method of pumping is the same as in Egypt: a couple of buckets worked by a swing beam handled by one or two men. A sheet of water some inches deep, is by this means kept over the surface of the rice-fields, which are so numerous in parts as to give the country the appearance of being in a state of inundation.

We reached the city of Nankow at mid-day, but

did not halt there, preferring to go straight through and take our mid-day meal (if a piece of chocolate and a biscuit can so be called), in the open country. A large wall runs through Nankow, often regarded by tourists as the Great Wall of China. Many Europeans are brought here from Pekin, and return thoroughly satisfied in their own minds, that they have seen the Great Wall, when, in fact, they have done nothing of the kind. The wall at Nankow is simply an offshoot of the real thing, and runs at right angles to it; moreover, the former is not so high, and its stones are cemented, which those of the Great Wall are not. I trust I am not a kill-joy to those who, reading these pages, have seen the Nankow wall, but as a matter of fact, the two are as different, both in construction and appearance, as black to white.

We were forced to take refuge in our litters traversing the city (which is one of some fifty thousand inhabitants), for the unwonted sight of Europeans in their midst, appeared to give the Nankowites great umbrage for some reason or other. Indeed, this was the sole instance of our being treated with anything but courtesy and good temper. The streets were so crowded as to make our

progress extremely difficult, for it was market-day, and half the roadway was taken up with canvas booths and stalls for the sale of silks, tea, crockery, and hardware, or fish, vegetables, and fruit, while every fifty yards or so, the fumes from "Kabob" stalls poisoned the air with a sickly, greasy odour. We were not sorry to get within sight of the outer gate. Near here was an open-air theatre in full swing, adding its quota of drums, clashing cymbals, and squeaky reed-pipes, to the general din. Some two or three hundred struggling men and women occupied the partition in front of the stage, meant to hold about half the number. No attempt had been made to shelter the audience from the blazing sun, and the smell that arose from this human cattle-pen, beggars description. Some six or seven performers in grotesque garments and hideous masks, were twisting their bodies about, singing through their noses, and endeavouring by their united efforts to drown the instruments at the back of the stage, in which they were only partly successful. The play, Jee Boo informed us, had been going on for a week, and was only half over. We stopped for a few minutes to watch the performance, the audience being too much engrossed

with it to pay any attention to us. Most of the action seemed to consist exclusively of fighting and love-making. The scenes dealing with the latter, were certainly more realistic than refined. There was no scenery, and apparently no dressing-rooms. One of the performers, after being slain by his adversary, got up again in a few seconds, and retiring to the back of the stage, changed all his clothes in full view of the audience, an operation that necessitated his appearing in a state of complete nudity, after which he calmly returned to the front to represent another part. There is apparently no Chinese Lord Chamberlain.

It took us nearly two hours to get clear of the city. Shortly afterwards, we entered the Nankow Pass, one of the most beautiful bits of scenery we passed through. The going was terribly rough, so much so that we had to dismount and lead the ponies, while the mule-litters plunged and rolled about among the boulders like ships in a storm. The road is simply formed by a kind of water-bed, about 150 yards across, which is in summer rendered almost impassable by the huge rocks and boulders that bar the way at every step. In winter it becomes a raging torrent, sweeping all before it, and after

heavy rains does considerable damage to life and property. The pass (which is a gradual ascent the whole way, and about thirteen miles long) compares very favourably with some of the grandest scenery in Switzerland or the Tyrol. Rugged, precipitous rocks overhang the defile on either side, great crags of granite that look as if a touch would send them crashing into the valley a hundred feet below. Although not a leaf or tree is visible, the different shades of colour taken by the rocks are even more beautiful than any vegetation could make them. As we neared the end of the pass, little bits of verdure became visible : oases of rich grass and cultivated flower-gardens banked round with bamboos, looking almost as if they were hanging perpendicularly on the steep grey walls; while tiny streamlets seemed to spring up from under our very feet to lose themselves a few yards lower down among the crevices formed by the huge rocks and boulders. After two hours' hard work, we emerged on a vast plain again, a plain of waving corn and barley, relieved here and there by brown villages and gaily coloured temples, while a glance behind showed us the city of Nankow spread out like a map at our feet, the rice and cotton plains we had passed through,

and the distant village of "Koo-ash," its temples and pagodas sparkling like diamonds on the far horizon.

A strange apparition appeared as we ate our solitary meal by the roadway. A tall gaunt European, bestriding an attenuated-looking mule, an individual who by his dress might have been anybody. A rough grey coat with yellow facings, a red handkerchief tied round the head, a pair of short thin cotton drawers reaching to the knee, and bare legs and feet, is hardly the costume with which we are wont to associate a courier of the Czar! but such the stranger proved to be. He eyed our whisky bottle wistfully as he passed us, and reined up the melancholy mule with a jerk. "Kouda?" ("whither?") he asked. "Moscow," we replied, at the same time filling him a bumper of Glenlivat, a proceeding that seemed to interest him much more than our probable destination. "Franzouski?" (French). "Niete: Anglis-ki." "Ah," he replied, with a shrug of the shoulders, and, tossing off the tumbler of raw whisky without a wink, rode off again, with the remark, "Ya Pekin" (I am for Pekin), but not a word of thanks. This was our first experience of the Russian Cossack,

and I was afterwards glad to find this rude boor an exception even to the lowest orders of that cheery, hospitable race,—better fellows than whom it would, as a rule, be hard to meet.

The country towards evening became flatter; the rice and cotton having given way to a bare sandy plain, stretching away on either side as far as the eye could reach without a break. The glare of the sun became very painful after the first hour or two, and we suffered a good deal that day from our eyes, a complaint that seems very prevalent among the inhabitants of the villages in this sterile region. The people, too, seemed very different in appearance and manner to those we had left in the plains below Nankow. Instead of the cheery "good-day" and smile with which many of the latter had greeted us, we were now looked upon only with a sullen stare: a kind of ocular "What do you want here?" This was all, however, for after Nankow we experienced no incivility whatsoever up to the Great Wall.

This was perhaps the hardest day's work we experienced throughout the whole voyage. Leaving Koo-ash at 5 a.m., we travelled incessantly, save for a halt of twenty minutes at mid-day, till eight at

night. Over fourteen hours' hard work on a stick of chocolate and a glass of whisky and water is not calculated to raise one's spirits under ordinary circumstances; but had we known what was before us we should have been even more depressed than we were, when, towards seven o'clock the towers and battlements of Kwi-La-Shaï appeared on the horizon, and we knew that our day's journey was nearly over.

The sun was setting as, crossing the river that flows past the walls of Kwi-La-Shaï, we drew up at the eastern gate of the city and awaited the permission of the guard to enter. But for fatigue and stiffness, I would willingly have remained outside the walls till the sun had disappeared. I have seldom seen a lovelier picture. It was like a scene from fairy-land. The broad, swift stream at our feet had caught the reflection of the western sky, which, one glow of rose colour, brought out the frowning walls and battlements of the city black and distinct as a pen-and-ink drawing. The whole vault of heaven was one flush of ever-changing hue, varying almost imperceptibly from the faintest shades of pink and gold in the west to where in the east stars were already glimmering in the steel-blue horizon.

The black, frowning walls, the desolate landscape around us, the confused and indistinct murmur of the huge population of which one could see nothing, made one almost wonder whether one was not dreaming and would not presently awake in a comfortable bed resolving never again to commit the imprudence of a late supper. It was not without a weird feeling that we rode into the city and heard the heavy iron gates close with a crash behind us. One felt so utterly at the mercy of the inhabitants of these remote cities, who, as they have so often shown, are angels one minute and devils the next.

The streets were, as usual, crowded, for the night was hot, and the population had apparently turned out *en masse* to take the air, and what air! Like many other beautiful things in this world, Kwi-La-Shaï is best seen at a distance, for we found it on closer acquaintance worse even than Pekin in point of stenches and filth. It is called in China a "village," which means that it is rather larger both as regards size and population than Birmingham. Though the streets were unlit, we managed to get to the inn by the aid of a guide, and once there, found no lack of light—indeed the court-

yard was one blaze of Chinese lanterns—nor of society either, for there must have been at least fifty men crowded into the small guest-room, to say nothing of camels, oxen, ponies, and carts, that crowded the muddy courtyard.

We rode into the yard and waited while Jee Boo went to interview the proprietor of this den, which for squalor and filth I have never seen equalled in the worst slums of London or Paris. We soon saw by the light of the lanterns that our fellow-lodgers were not Chinamen. Their quaint barbaric dress, to say nothing of swarthy flat faces and beady black eyes, at once proclaimed them Mongols. Twenty or thirty of them were round us, in less than five minutes after our arrival, squatting on their hams in the mud and passing their opinions on our appearance. Many of them, Jee Boo said, had never seen a European before. They annoyed us not a little, too, by continually feeling our clothes, boots, and even faces, with their hot grimy hands, a proceeding that, tired and hungry as we were, with no prospect of rest or food, did not tend to improve the temper. A pair of velvet cord breeches that Lancaster wore came in for the greater share of their

attention, which I was (selfishly, I own) not sorry for.

Two half-naked men, who had been attending to a couple of large cauldrons in a kind of out-house, now summoned our inquisitive friends, much to our relief. We saw them enter the shed, where each man having produced a wooden platter they set to and left us in peace, at any rate, for a time.

Jee Boo returned soon after.

"Big caravan from Mongolia. No can have room," was his first remark. "Money no good," he added, on my suggesting a few dollars as bribery; anything for a fairly clean place to lay our weary bones. What was to be done? We could not sleep in the courtyard, that was very certain, when a bright thought suddenly struck me —the litters.

Alas! they, too, were gone, and the muleteers with them, in quest of lodgings elsewhere. They had fortunately omitted to take our box of provisions with them. Jee Boo had meanwhile disappeared, but soon after returned with the information that on payment of $8 we could have the room of the chief of the caravan. "A very good place," urged our

interpreter, who, was evidently standing in with the Mongol. However, we should have been only too glad to pay double the price for a dog-kennel that night. Anything to lie down upon, and get away from the attentions of the Mongols, who had by this time finished their meal, and were again issuing from the kitchen, lighting their pipes, and preparing for another examination of the "White Devils."

It was only after a good deal of demur that the good gentleman I have mentioned turned out of his lair—a place about nine feet square, with a raised wooden platform upon which he had been reclining, and upon which he was thoughtful enough to leave us several souvenirs which I need not mention. To say the place was dirty conveys but a very poor impression of the filth that lay thickly on the walls, and the nameless abominations that strewed the sleeping-place—half a dozen rough boards about a foot from the floor. There were luckily two large holes in the rafters which would give us, at any rate, some ventilation, for the glazed paper window was not made to open. Cooking was, of course, out of the question, but we managed to boil some

water in the spirit-lamp, and get a basin of Liebig. Our Valentine meat-juice had, unluckily, gone on with the other stores. It would have been priceless that night, and never again will I embark on a journey of this kind without it.

We had reckoned without our host when we thought that bolting and barring the door would ensure us privacy. First a finger, then a thumb, then a whole hand was pushed through the paper window, notwithstanding all our protestations. We did not like to use threats, or show firearms, for an Englishman more or less would have been of little moment to the good people of Kwi-La-Shaï. So we had to sit and suffer in silence, until one of our tormentors, more pushing than the rest, who had climbed upon the roof to obtain a bird's-eye view, came crashing through the rickety rafters on to our heads. We certainly *did* bundle him out with scant ceremony, and banging the door after him, blew out the light and composed, or tried to compose ourselves, to slumber.

But no sooner was the light out than we were attacked by vermin in myriads. A quarter of an hour of it nearly drove us mad, and we resolved to

strike a light, rising only to find that we had no matches, and that all in the yard was now dark and silent as the grave. So, resigned to our fates, we lay still, and, like the shipwrecked mariner, prayed for dawn! Tired and worn out as we were, five minutes' sleep was out of the question. We had good cause to remember Kwi-La-Shaï; indeed, it was a good three weeks before we were entirely free from the animal nocturnal visitors of that unsavoury city.

The caravan had already started on its way to Pekin when we set off at six the next morning. Our mule-driver and Jee Boo had evidently made a night of it on the proceeds of their bargain, for the former only arrived on the scene five minutes before the hour fixed for departure, and our interpreter turned up hopelessly fuddled just as we were getting the mules in and ponies saddled. We were amply avenged, though, for the day was the hottest we had yet experienced, and Jee Boo suffered the tortures of *mal de mer* in a litter the greater part of it!

The road now lay through deep sand, in which, however, the caravan track was distinctly discernible. A boisterous and hot wind made it very unpleasant

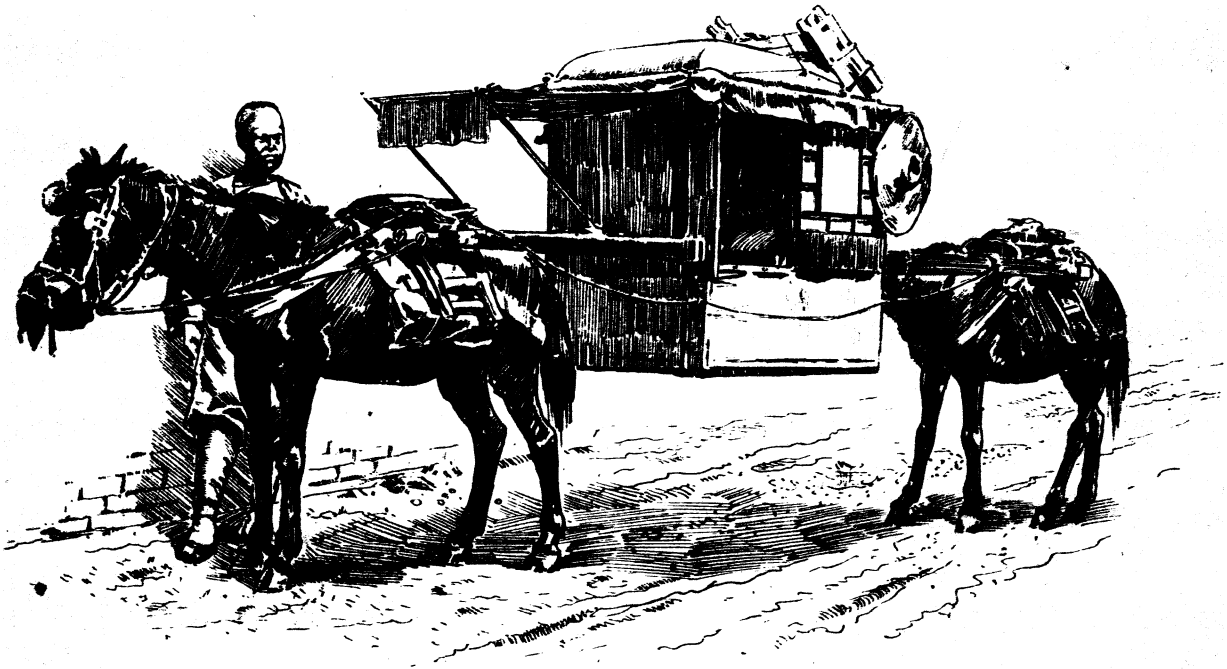
travelling, and we were not sorry to reach the village of Tchuan-Ha-Ho at midday, where we insisted on a halt of five hours at least, for the purpose of indulging in a "square meal," as Americans say, and a rest, of which we were much in need. Just before reaching the town, we passed a string of over two hundred camels laden with Siberian furs for Pekin. Also a drove of some three hundred or four hundred Mongolian ponies. Some of the latter, though small, were remarkably well-shaped and good-looking.

Tchuan-Ha-Ho is the only place I retain a pleasing recollection of, lying between Pekin and the Great Wall of China. The inn was fairly clean, and the proprietor not only suggested, but cooked us a dish of excellent poached eggs. Rarely have I enjoyed a meal as I did that. One must have fasted for nearly thirty-six hours as we had, to really appreciate food. It is worth all the tonics in the world. We felt much tempted to stay here the night, but our mule-drivers were inexorable. They had contracted to get us to Kalgan by a certain date, and at Kalgan, on that date, dead or alive, we must be!

The sandy desert ceased after leaving Tchuan-

Ha-Ho, and we again entered a fertile country, set apart apparently for the exclusive cultivation of the poppy. White, red, and blue—poppies were everywhere—the plain presenting a succession of waves of colour as far as the eye could reach. Beyond this lay Ching-Ming-Ying, lying under a perpendicular rock about 800 feet high. This village, which contains seven thousand inhabitants, is strongly walled and fortified. The rock or mountain is on three sides sheer precipice. Notwithstanding this, there are some twenty or thirty houses on the extreme summit, built so near the edge that their sides actually form part of the precipice. Seventy or eighty human beings live on this eminence, though the path up is dangerous to any but experienced mountaineers, and the area of the summit but three hundred yards square. This was undoubtedly one of the most interesting and curious sights of the whole voyage, for there are men and women over forty years of age living upon this mountain that have never descended to the plains below. Supplies and stores are taken up by men kept specially for the purpose.

Coal is worked out of the base of the Ching-Ming



A MULE LITTER.

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Ying mountain by the Chinese Government, to whom the mines belong. It seemed to be put out in a very desultory sort of way. Some thirty men only were engaged in the mines, though with their usual contradictory spirit the Government had provided the manager or overseer with a palatial residence at the foot of the mountain, embowered in bright flower-gardens and willow-trees.

The weather, which had up till now been bright and clear, now grew overcast, and, shortly after leaving Ching-Ming-Ying the rain came down in torrents, rendering travelling very unpleasant, not to say dangerous. Our way now lay along a road hewn out of the solid rock, by the banks of a foaming torrent some hundred yards broad, which we followed the course of till we reached our destination for the night—Tsiang-Shui-Poo. Here we rode along now a foot or so above the water's edge, anon at least fifty feet above the water, in places where a false step or slip would have sent one flying into the torrent below, for there was no guard-rail, and the path, broken and rugged, was at times scarcely three feet wide. I thought discretion the better part of valour after a time, and led Karra till we got on to *terra firma* again in the shape of a broad

stretch of sand, which brought us to the village of Tsiang-Shui-Poo, wet through, and without any means of changing, but at the same time relieved that the next day with any luck would see us at Kalgan.

The village of Tsiang-Shui-Poo was *really* a village, for it boasted of some hundred inhabitants and thirty or forty houses. The inn (an open shed in which cattle and men slept promiscuously) was at any rate clean, and we managed to get a good sleep on a wisp of straw free from the stench of sewage that had annoyed us so much everywhere else. Some of the inhabitants came to look at us as we discussed the evening meal. The men were cheery, good-looking fellows, and the women far prettier than any I had yet seen, for their faces were devoid of paint—and they had almost European complexions. Tsiang-Shui-Poo was to us an Elysium —a haven of rest—which reminded one for all the world of the lovely Kentish village of Farningham, which is no doubt known to many of my readers. There was the trout stream at the bottom of the garden, the clover meadows with their fresh, sweet scent, the corn ripening for the sickle on the hill behind the inn—although, to be sure, two stunted

willows had to do duty for the famous chestnut-tree in front of that cosy old inn, the "Red Lion;" and, I fancy, even the genial host of that celebrated hostelry would have lost his temper at the fare set before him by Boniface of the "Cattle-Shed Hotel" at Tsiang-Shui-Poo!

By next morning the rain had entirely disappeared, and with a blue sky and cool breeze we left Tsiang-Shui-Poo, invigorated in mind and body by a good long sleep. I cannot pronounce, much less write, the name of the village we halted at at midday. It was evident we were nearing Kalgan, for we passed at least a dozen large caravans during the morning, to say nothing of carts, litters, and stray horsemen. The poppy-fields were now superseded by rice-plains, irrigated as before by "shaloofs," and interspersed with enclosures of corn and maize.

We lunched in a fairly clean room of the inn at the town with the unpronounceable name. Many Russians appeared to have visited it, for their names (in Russian characters) were scrawled all over the place. In one corner, in small capitals, we read:—"Bordeaux à Pekin par terre. Sep. 4th, 1870."

Shortly before five o'clock a low chain of hills appeared on the horizon. Had it not been specially pointed out to me, I should never have noticed the thin serpentine thread winding its course along their summit—an irregular white line lost to sight at times, in places where it was broken into by forest or undergrowth: a very different edifice from one's preconceived ideas of the Great Wall of China.

We entered Kalgan at half past six o'clock. It will give the reader some idea of the size of the place when I say that it took us nearly two hours to ride from the southern gate to the suburb of Yambooshan, where the Russian tea-merchants lived, to whom we were provided with a letter of introduction. The population of Kalgan is estimated at over one hundred and fifty thousand.

Our mule-drivers suggested an immediate adjournment to the inn, for the Russians, they said, lived outside the gates of Kalgan, at Yambooshan. The gate was shut at seven, after which hour, no one, European or otherwise, was permitted to enter or leave the city; but we stuck to our determination of seeing M. Batouyeff before nightfall. Riding

out of the southern gate, we emerged on to a dry river-bed, on either banks of which stood several substantial and well-built houses of Chinese architecture. At the head of the valley stood apart from the others a single dwelling *à l'Européenne*—a pretty two-storied house with verandah and gaily coloured venetians, standing in a spacious garden, down the centre path of which, as soon as we came in sight, two white-clad Europeans hurried to meet us.

One of these proved to be M. Ivanoff—partner of M. Batouyeff, who was, he explained, at that time away at Chefoo for a couple of months, enjoying the sea breezes after a residence of five years here without a break. Luckily for us M. Ivanoff spoke English fluently, having spent several years at Tientsin. He laughed outright when we asked him to direct us to the inn. "Ah, gentlemen, I hope you have not such a poor opinion of Russian hospitality as that," said our friend, as he led the way up the neat gravel walk, lined with rose and geranium beds, to the house—where we found two large airy bedrooms, a sitting-room, and, best of all, a large bath-room placed at our disposal. "I do not live here myself, but my clerk will do anything for

you. You have but to call 'Michailof.' He lives next door. Dinner will be served at eight o'clock. Gentlemen, I wish you good evening, and will do myself the pleasure of calling upon you again to-morrow."

Here was luxury indeed. The sight of the bed was almost too much for me. I felt inclined to forego dinner altogether, jump in, and revel in its clean, soft sheets and white dainty curtains! A delicious warm bath, a change of clothes, and we found ourselves seated at an open window, looking down upon the moon-bathed valley of Yambooshan, enjoying an excellent dinner *à la russe*, washed down by a still more excellent bottle of Chateau Lafitte. "Here's to the Russians," said Lancaster, as we tossed off for the first time a glass of that insidious though delicious liqueur "Vodka." "How the English do misunderstand them," I echoed: a sentiment I had occasion to repeat more than once during our weary pilgrimage through the Asiatic realms of the White Czar.

CHAPTER IV.

KALGAN, OR CHANG-CHIA-KOW.

We had intended making a stay of four or five days, at the most, at Kalgan. This, we thought, would give us ample time to get carts, camels, and men for the crossing of the Great Gobi Desert; for, we had been led to believe, when at Tientsin, that there would not be the slightest necessity for remaining more than a day or so at the frontier city, unless we particularly wished to do so. But, alas! as at Pekin, fresh difficulties cropped up hourly; and when we broached to M. Ivanoff our intention of leaving for Ourga in three or four days' time, he simply laughed in our faces.

"You must recollect you are not in Europe," said the hospitable Russian, "and also that Mongols are worse even than Chinamen in the matter of delay. Moreover, I shall have to get your carts built, a question of ten days at the very least. The camels, too, are all out on the plains. No,

gentlemen; I fear you must make up your minds to at least a fortnight's imprisonment in Kalgan!"

There was nothing for it under the circumstances but to smile and look pleasant, thanking Providence, meanwhile, for giving us such comfortable quarters, and not cooping us up in a Chinese inn. Considering everything, we had by no means a bad time of it with the Russian tea-merchants at Kalgan.

They certainly had a very fair idea of making themselves comfortable. The house of our host was especially so, and by no means the kind of dwelling one would expect to find in this out-of-the-way corner of the earth. We had pictured to ourselves a rough wooden shanty—we found a well-built stone house with cool, lofty bedrooms, a pretty drawing-room, with grand piano and bright chintzes, singing-birds, and flowers; and French windows opening on to the creeper-covered verandah, whence one looked on to the beautiful valley of Kalgan. At one's feet a shady garden wherein roses, Eucharis lilies, jasmine, mignonette, and other flowers grew in wild profusion, though untended and uncared for; while in the far distance the Great

Wall of China, now towering on a summit, now lost in a valley, wound like a huge serpent, its course of two thousand miles. Nor were the more substantial things of life uncared for, for our host had an excellent cook, and in this land of milk and honey there was no lack of material for his culinary efforts. The Kalgan mutton is excellent, and potatoes, cauliflowers, cabbages, peas, lettuce, even asparagus, thrive there, all imported from Russia, to say nothing of Chinese vegetables with unpronounceable names, and still more curious taste. Our host's cook was an artist; his claret undeniable; his cigars good. We had certainly tumbled upon our legs at Kalgan.

The city of Chang-Chia-Kow, or Kalgan, is built on the banks of a broad, swift-flowing river. Running at right angles to this, between two precipitous mountains, is the narrower gorge of Yambooshan, the houses thereof standing outside the gates of the city, and built close into the side of the hills, portions of which in some cases had been blasted away to admit them. There is a reason for this. The dry, shingly road, which in summer serves as highway to thousands of caravans, becomes in winter

a roaring torrent, which sweeps down the valley with terrific force to join the larger stream, at times occasioning great loss of life. At the time of our visit, the river-bed was absolutely dry, though the preceding winter had been a severe one, and much damage had been done in the spring.

We spent a good deal of our time watching the caravans as they jingled and rattled along the stony river-bed to or from Pekin. Many were laden with wood cut into logs and brought from the mountains near Ourga, across the desert, for wood is scarce in Northern China, and I do not think we passed more than a dozen trees in all the whole way from the capital to the Great Wall. Between Yambooshan and the city of Kalgan is the "Gap," where the road narrows to a width of about nine feet. It is from this the city takes its name, the word "Kalga" signifying in the Mongolian tongue a gap or gate. It has been estimated that three hundred and fifty thousand chests of tea pass through here annually, for every caravan is bound to pass Kalgan on its way east or west. There is no other road. Thus about forty million chests of tea pass through annually to Mongolia and

Siberia, and Ivanoff (who has much experience in these matters) was of opinion that when the projected line from Irkoutsk to Tomsk is completed, there will be a further increase of a hundred and fifty thousand chests, making in all the enormous total of five hundred thousand chests annually. No railway can ever be made across Gobi. The means of transit must always remain what it has ever been, i.e. by the "Ship of the Desert."

The best tea never leaves China, and nearly all the next best in quality goes to Russia. Few people in England know what good tea really is. An immense trade in Asiatic Russia is done in what is known as brick tea, an article I shall describe later on, and which is drunk chiefly by the Mongols and lower classes in Siberia. This is pressed into oblong cakes, about two pounds in weight, and is made of tea dust, stalks, and refuse, mixed with bullocks' blood, to give it a flavour. I never tasted a viler concoction in my life.

"You English boil your tea," Ivanoff would say, when on his favourite topic. "How can you expect to get it good;" and there is no doubt much in this. I got into a habit in Siberia and Russia of drinking tea at all hours of the day and night, and learnt to

make it *à la Russe*—two teaspoonfuls to each cup; then pour boiling water into the pot, so as just to cover the leaves, and at once pour it out again, afterwards adding the requisite amount of liquid. Let it stand for two or three minutes at most, and drink. The Russians never drink their tea twice over, as we do, but change the leaves and the pot every fresh brew. This makes a good deal more difference than some may think. I have heard English people deny that overland tea is any better than that sent by sea, but I do not think there can be any real doubt about it. As a matter of fact, genuine overland tea very rarely finds its way to England.

The city of Kalgan proper, reminds one more of an Egyptian or Arab town than a Chinese one. The dwellings are of baked mud, unwhitewashed, and flat roofed. Some are ornamented with arabesques, and gaily-striped awnings, many of their façades being half hidden with clustering vines. The "Yamen," or court-house, is the only building of pure Chinese architecture in the whole place, and one felt, when taking a stroll through its busy streets and covered bazaars, as if one had been suddenly transplanted

from the heart of the Chinese Empire to some town in Central Asia. There is more colour, too, than in most Chinese towns, the eternal dark blue or white dress of the natives being relieved by the gaudy dresses and barbaric trappings of the Mongolian Tartar. The very smell of the place, too, was different to those we had passed through, the half fishy, half spicy odour with which every traveller in Northern China is familiar, being superseded by the sickly smell of argol-smoke, old rags, and general filth that clings to the Mongol wherever he goes. They were not reassuring to look at, these Mongols. It was not altogether pleasant to think that a fortnight more would see us consigned to the tender mercies of this wild, nomad race, two solitary Europeans, alone and unprotected in the great desert of Gobi. At first sight the Mongol Tartar decidedly inspired us with respect, not to say mistrust.

There are few noisier and busier places than Kalgan. The row in the middle of the day was deafening, and the clouds of black dust, raised by the perpetual traffic, unbearable. It was amusing sometimes to walk in the busiest part of the day, to the

market-place, in the middle of the city, where the great horse, or rather pony mart is situated. There must have been some three or four hundred ponies the morning we were there, being trotted and galloped up and down for sale—for export to Pekin and other parts of China. It was exciting, not to say dangerous, work, apparently, for the wild desert horsemen tore hither and thither, utterly regardless of where they went, or whom they knocked down or collided with. I saw half a dozen falls in less than half an hour; but the riders did not seem to mind, nor did it occasion any chaff or merriment among the crowd of bystanders, as would have been the case in England. The riders merely got up, and with a shake of the shoulders waited till the yelling, chattering crowd had caught and restored the runaway! Though the ground was rough and flint-strewn, no one seemed to mind a fall. Round the square were a number of tea-houses and sheds for the sale of "Airak" (native brandy), where the wily Pekin Chinaman might be seen hob-nobbing with the swarthy Tartar over a "deal." I fancy the latter usually got the worst of the bargain. The ponies were beautifully shaped, wiry little animals, about thirteen to fourteen hands. I saw one, a chestnut, sold for eight dollars, which would

have fetched thirty or forty guineas in England. At mid-day it became almost impossible to make one's way through the crowds of people that thronged the narrow streets, and crowded the canvas booths for the sale of iced drinks, tea, tobacco, and other refreshments erected along the foot-paths. At such moments, on a fine day, the bright sunshine, gaudy dresses of the Mongols, white and blue of the Chinese, thronging the streets of the huge walled city, with its amphitheatre of rugged, precipitous hills, made a picture as unique as it was interesting. The whole place looked like a gigantic fair. Street tumblers, jugglers, and fortune-tellers plied a brisk trade in the middle of the roadway, heedless of yelling, wild-looking Mongols galloping madly about on ponies, while the shop-keepers at the top of their voices cried out from their doors the excellence of their wares, each trying to outyell his neighbour. Add to this the clashing of cymbals and beating of gongs from a theatre hard by, and you have a faint idea of a street in Kalgan at mid-day.

Here, as in Pekin, the dust acts as a disinfectant, and Kalgan is by no means an unhealthy place, though the heat in summer is as severe as in

winter the cold is intense. I know no place so inspiriting on a fine day, so depressing on a dull one, as Kalgan. In the former case all was animation, life, and colour. The sky of Mediterranean blue, and the verdant, smiling hills and gaily-coloured verandahs and dresses of the natives, coupled with the keen, inspiriting air, enlivened the spirits like a glass of champagne; but on a dull or rainy day everything around looked dark and depressing. A kind of fog hung over everything, over the mountain tops wreathed in dank, white mist, the grey, lowering sky, and brown, mud-coloured dwellings, while the white wooden crosses in the Russian cemetery, just to the right of our house, stood out with uncomfortable prominence. It was on days like this that one realized how far one was from England, how many thousand leagues of unknown country lay between us and home.

Dull days were in the minority, however, and our time passed pleasantly enough, if somewhat uneventfully, at Kalgan. There were but eleven European residents in all, five of them belonging to the two Russian tea firms, the remainder to an American Mission established here ten years ago. "We are like the rival editors in Peek-Veek," said Ivanoff one

day, alluding to himself and his *confrère* in the tea-trade. "We do not speak; and have not for some years." I was not a little surprised to find our host so well up in English literature, till I heard that Dickens, as well as many other standard authors, has been largely translated into Russian, and has an enormous sale at Irkoutsk (our friend's native place), and other parts of Siberia.

We called on the mission one day, whose head-quarters are in a substantially stone-built house standing in beautiful gardens on the out-skirts of the city. One might almost have imagined oneself in some country parsonage in England, drinking tea in a cool, pretty drawing-room, while a fresh, sweet smell stole in through the French windows from the hay and clover fields. Four were lady missionaries, two of whom were certificated doctors, who had, Ivanoff told us, done wonders in the epidemic of typhus, that had visited Kalgan two years previously, and by their untiring efforts and wonderful cures had made many converts. We were welcomed, on entering the house, by a pretty little Chinese lady, unaccountably so, as we thought, for one of her race. The mystery was explained

when she invited us to be seated, in our own language, and further told us that although she had adopted Chinese costume, she was an American. Mrs. S—— had only been married three months, and had come straight from New York to Kalgan, to share her husband's fortunes in the wilds, for she was about to leave for a mission four hundred miles from Kalgan, situated in one of the most dangerous districts of the Chinese empire. Her husband came in shortly after, also in Chinese costume, with the addition of a pigtail! It is a rule that every one connected with this society shall wear native dress; and when at their posts in Central China the missionaries are expected to eat like the natives. I could not help pitying the pretty, delicate-looking little woman when I thought of the trials and dangers she was embarking on. She seemed quite undismayed, however, and laughed and prattled away about the career she had chosen like a child—indeed she was little more than one in years.

Another missionary, Mr. C——, had arrived that morning from his post five hundred miles off, a hazardous and fatiguing journey, which he had made in under six weeks, bringing his little son, under two years old, with him, notwithstanding that some of the

journey over the passes had to be done on foot. The natives of the regions through which he had passed, had, he told us, insisted upon it, that the little fellow was an old man, for he had very light, almost white hair. Most of them were "Tow-ists." The founder of this sect is believed by its followers to have been born at the age of eighty-three, with grey hair. Hence their refusal to be persuaded, notwithstanding Mr. C——'s most earnest assurance that his son was not an old man! "Kalgan," said Mr. C——, "is, in the eyes of Mahometans, the Bokhara of China, and there are large colleges here, where the teachers of the Mahometan faith are educated. Although the three great Chinese religions are Confucianism, Buddhism, and Tow-ism, there are many more Mahometans existing in China than is generally supposed; their faith in the Celestial Empire is governed by a consistory of as many as seventy persons."

We stayed to dinner, and bade adieu to our hosts at sundown, having to be outside the city gates before seven o'clock. Mr. T——, the head of the mission, expressed a hope, before we left, that we should not follow the example of the last travellers (a German and a Frenchman), who had attempted the transit of

Gobi, armed with a perfect arsenal of firearms and escorted by a large caravan. Ten days from the start they were back again in Kalgan, having fallen out on the way. That was their excuse ; but I doubt, from subsequent experience, if the dreary monotony of the desert had not more to do with it, for they were good friends enough, when, after two days' rest at the mission, they set off for Japan.

Arrived at the Great Gate of the city, on our homeward way, we found ourselves, together with some dozen other unfortunate beings, locked out, or rather in, for the night. All our efforts to induce the gatekeeper to let us out were fruitless, for he simply responded to our frantic signs and gestures with a grin and shrug of the shoulders, and crawled back into his foul-smelling den, to discuss the mess of pigs' entrails, slugs, or some Chinese delicacy of a like description, which constituted his evening meal. The position was awkward. To climb the walls was out of the question. Their height precluded that, for the city walls of Kalgan are at this point actually part of the Great Wall of China itself. The only way out of the dilemma was to drop a distance of thirty feet or so on to some rocks at a point about three hundred to four hundred yards from the gate, but we preferred

even a night in a tea-house, to a sojourn of a month or two at Kalgan, tied down with a broken leg. There was nothing for it but to sit down patiently and trust to Ivanoff's coming to release us, though that seemed unlikely enough, seeing that he lived some distance from Batouyeff's house, and never visited it after nightfall. Matters were not improved by a thin drizzling rain which began to fall after we had waited nearly an hour, and drove us to seek refuge in a crowded tea-house close by the gates, the resort of the gay dogs of Kalgan who are locked out of their homes for the night. The stench and smoke, though, soon drove us out again, to say nothing of the aggressive curiosity of the inmates, the greater part of whom were Mongols. Nine o'clock, ten, eleven o'clock passed, and yet no Ivanoff, or signs of a rescue from our awkward situation. We should long before have tried an expedient that seldom fails in any country, never in China, but alas! we had no cash. At one o'clock, a.m., we gave it up as a bad job, and had resolved to get what sleep we could on the ground, wet and miry as it was, when, in searching for a light, I came upon a hard round substance in my waistcoat pocket, and found a dollar that had reposed there ever

since the day I last wore the garment, six weeks ago, in Shanghai. Armed with this, I entered the old janitor's den. He was still awake, smoking and crooning over the dying embers of an argol fire. The effect was instantaneous. In less than five minutes the mercenary old wretch had summoned help from the tea-shop, which was still blazing with light, and crowded with people. After much difficulty and labour, unbolting and unbarring, the heavy gates, guided by the efforts of six men, swung slowly back upon their hinges and let us out, stiff, cramped, and in a fiendish temper, but free, and followed by the ragged rabble who had been our fellow-captives, and who luckily for us led us direct for Batouyeff's house, for we should never have found our way alone. An excellent supper soon made amends for our discomfort. All had retired to rest, thinking we had slept at the Mission-house.

An extraordinary being called upon us next morning, and one looked upon as a character by the European population of Kalgan. The visiting-card which announced him told us but little; a piece of flimsy red paper about eight inches long by five broad covered with Chinese characters; and we

wondered what the caller could possibly want, not without grave doubts that an order might have come from Pekin to stop us. Our visitor was then shown in, a short, intelligent-looking man of about fifty, who, to our astonishment, spoke English perfectly. We had a long chat (and many successive ones) with Captain Lew Buah (for such was the stranger's name), of the Chinese Navy, who entertained the usual liking of his profession for cold brandy and water, and delighted in nothing more than in coming to spend the afternoon to fight his battles over again, rather to the detriment of our small stock of spirits. He had been exiled to Kalgan, he told us, for five years, in consequence of being the only man who had saved his ship from the French at Foochow. Ten other Chinese men-of-war were sunk on this occasion, but Lew Buah, seeing defence was useless, had run his steamer, a gunboat of three hundred tons, up a small creek of the river, and so saved her from the enemy. For this he was, unjustly enough, condemned to death, a sentence afterwards commuted to five years' exile on the Mongolian border. If the captain's yarn was true, he was certainly to be pitied, for his other exploits (which I have since ascer-

tained were not exaggerated) make him out anything but a coward.

One of them was amusing enough. Having run the blockade of Formosa three times, he was on the fourth occasion, when carrying a cargo of soldiers, captured by a French man-of-war, the commander of which had for some time been trying in vain to catch him. Luckily for our friend, however, the soldiers were sent from Manchuria unarmed and disguised as peasants, and neither the captain nor officers of the Frenchman knew him by sight. He was, however, taken on board at once, and examined by a Chinese interpreter in presence of the French commander. Oddly enough the former was an old friend of Lew Buah's, and intimated by a wink as soon as his countryman came on board that all would be right. Nothing suspicious was found on board Lew Buah's ship, and he was allowed to depart in peace, the French captain observing as he left, "If you see that d——d scoundrel Lew Buah, tell him from me I'll hang him to my main yard-arm whenever he crosses my path." The telling of this yarn was the old gentleman's greatest delight, and he would return with fresh vigour to the brandy bottle after telling

us how he had done the foreign devil in the eye. The old fellow's life had been a somewhat chequered one. It commenced at Canton where his father had been a street fruit-hawker, carrying his wares in two baskets slung across his shoulders by a bamboo; in one basket was the fruit, balanced by little Lew Buah in the other! An English lady who happened to meet the strange couple, took a violent fancy to the fat, chubby-cheeked baby, and having no children of her own, prevailed upon his father, nothing loth, to sell her his son for the modest price of ten dollars. He thus, at the early age of two years, fairly lit on his legs, and, after a residence of fifteen years with his benefactress, returned to China and obtained a commission in the Imperial Navy, in which, up to the time of the unfortunate *contre-temps* at Foochow he had greatly distinguished himself. Though the captain spoke English fluently, some of his expressions were at times very original. We asked him one day if there was any sport to be got round Kalgan, upon which he informed us that the hills around abounded with "Scotch woodcock." Still, for a Chinaman, the old fellow had charming manners, and was a thorough gentleman in thought and feeling.

As I have said, a bitter feud existed between Ivanoff and his confrère; but the postmaster, M. Kolestnikoff, and our host were firm friends. Both, too, were ardent sportsmen, and invited us one morning to join them in a day's shooting in the hills and ravines round Kalgan. Ivanoff's costume was somewhat singular, consisting of a suit of spotless white canvas, silk socks and dancing-pumps, while round his neck was slung an enormous field-glass. Politeness forbade my making inquiries till we got to the shooting-ground. I imagined, at least, that we were going deerstalking, judging from the caution our Russian friends displayed in climbing about the crags and peaks. It was terribly hard climbing, and our hands were torn and bleeding when we reached the summit of the mountain, about a mile from the house, where the day's sport was to commence. Here I was somewhat surprised to see Ivanoff lay down his gun, and, gravely unslinging his huge pair of glasses, intently scan the rocks of a mountain separated from us by a narrow ravine. Evidently they are after deer, I thought, thankful that I had brought some bullet cartridges with me,

when suddenly our host dropped the glasses and seized my arm. Following the direction in which he was pointing, I made out, with some difficulty, what looked like a covey of partridges sunning themselves on the plain eighty or a hundred feet below us. "Will you shoot first?" said Ivanoff, cocking a huge muzzle-loader almost the size of a duck gun. "But are we not going to walk them up?" asked Lancaster, who, like myself, was somewhat bewildered at their strange proceedings. "Walk them up?" inquired the Russian, with a puzzled look, "walk them up? what do you mean? No, no, shoot from here, I will show you," and lying flat on his stomach, he took deliberate aim at the unconscious victims. Bang went the old field-piece with a report that woke a thousand echoes from the hills around, and must have been heard distinctly at Kalgan, over a mile off. When the thick white smoke had cleared away, there was but one little brown body lying extended on the ground, a sight which was received with rapturous applause by the postmaster, who was watching the proceedings from a rock higher up. We shot, or rather climbed and fell about, till mid-

day, but saw no more birds. If the sport was not first-class, the excitement was intense. In some of the places we literally had to hold on by our eyelids, and squeeze past sheer falls of two hundred or three hundred feet, on to the sharp, rugged rocks below. Ivanoff afterwards told us that a brace is accounted a good bag at Kalgan, which seems curious when the desert hard by teems with game of all kinds. Perhaps, though, the method practised by our Kalgan friends had something to do with the small bags.

We could have had plenty of fun with the pigeons, which flew about in huge flocks in the mountain-paths about Kalgan; but as we were the guests of a Russian we did not like to shoot them.[1] We saw many hundreds of specimens of a peculiar kind of beetle in the lower and swampy grounds, an animal rather larger than a mouse, with a long whip-tail, and short broad black body, covered with bright red bands. I was unable to discover its name. They do no harm to the crops, Ivanoff said, living chiefly on smaller insects, and are largely eaten by the natives, who consider them a great delicacy.

[1] The pigeon in Russia, and especially Siberia, is looked upon as a sacred bird.

We crossed the Great Wall of China on our way home, or rather a portion of it that had broken away and left a mass of shapeless stone and rubble. Its height is wonderfully deceptive. Seen from the valley it looked five or six feet high at the very most, but on taking the trouble to measure its dimensions we found it to be twenty-three feet in height, about twelve feet wide at the base, and seven at the top. It has a tumble-down, dilapidated appearance, for, saving the square battlemented towers that are built in it at every four hundred yards or so, it is uncemented, and composed of huge loose stones gradually decreasing in size as they near the coping. Though the stones have rolled away in places and left great gaps in the structure, one only realizes on approaching it close—at Kalgan no easy matter—what a herculean work the building of this barrier two thousand miles long must have been. The stones of which it is composed are so time-worn and moss-covered that it is almost impossible to say to what species they belong ; they seemed mostly of one kind, and extremely heavy. I managed to secure three small ones for paper weights, while Ivanoff and Kolestnikoff "kept cave," the Mongols and Chinese being very jealous of any interference with their

property or institutions. At the same time no one ever dreams of repairing the gaps, though it would be easy enough. As the reader is probably aware, the Great Wall of China was built about 300 B.C. by the Chinese, as a defence against the Tartar hordes who were then ravaging the countries bordering on their frontier.

We had now been at Kalgan nearly ten days, and our carts were approaching completion, but there were as yet no signs of the camels. Two suspicious-looking gentlemen (a Mongol and a Chinese) called on us one evening with a plausible tale of being able to bring us eight camels on the morrow, and, that we might be delayed no longer, themselves undertook to guide us across the desert to Ourga. Ivanoff was then away for two days, and on my replying that I could give no definite answer without consulting him, the faces of our visitors lengthened considerably. Their intention was probably to rob and desert us, for on seeing that we were determined to await our host's return before closing with them, they vanished to return no more. A more villainous-looking couple I have seldom seen, and, if appearance goes for anything, there is no doubt they meant mischief.

Comfortable as were our quarters and host, we were getting a little tired of Kalgan, for besides strolling about the streets and loafing about on the caravan track, there was absolutely nothing to do. Our chief occupation of a morning was to ramble round the city, whiling away an hour or two at the Chinese theatre, booths or shops. In the afternoon it was amusing to watch the long strings of wood-carts come jingling and rattling along the stony river-bed from Mongolia, and lazy, sleepy-looking camel caravans crawling along under their burdens of furs and other products of Siberia. Some were a hundred and fifty to two hundred strong, and one wondered why, when there were so many of them about, they could not afford to let us have half a dozen or so to fit out our modest expedition across the Great Hungry Desert, as it is called by the Chinese. We had learnt by now, however, that suggestions do not hurry this journey, but retard it, however feasible the project, so wisely held our peace.

Towards evening we usually found our way to the summit of a rocky mountain about a couple of miles from Kalgan, and watched the sunset, which was, as a rule, of exceptional beauty. Though the ascent was steep and arduous, one was well

repaid by the view when it was over. The ravine leading to it was a kind of crack or fissure, evidently of volcanic origin, and pitch dark on the brightest day, save for a patch of bright blue sky seen through the narrow aperture overhead. Emerging from this, one came to a steep, almost perpendicular grass slope, crowned at its summit by a huge limestone rock literally riddled with caves, and occupied by thousands of huge black and white birds sitting motionless at their outlets, winking and blinking at the setting sun, and looking as if no human being had broken in upon their solitude for centuries. They displayed not the slightest alarm at our approach, but gathered in groups and cawed and screamed as if in anger at our intrusion. Not a dwelling was to be seen, not a sound heard to break the silence but the occasional rustle of wings, the croak of some huge bird, or the distant crash of some boulder or stone as it dislodged itself to fall heavily into the dark valley below. One could see from here the limitless chains of mountains that surround Kalgan, the great wall stretching away east and west to the horizon, and beyond it, a long, level sea-like expanse, the green and fertile plains of China. Nearer still, nestling in the

valley, lay Kalgan, with its white houses and flower-gardens, its coloured awnings and terraces, extending for a mile and more along the banks of the broad blue river, and half-way up the steep, rugged mountain behind the city. It was hard to realize at such times that one was so far from the civilized world. It needed but a slight effort to imagine oneself in Europe again, hidden away in some secluded mountain village in the Alps or Pyrenees. Pleasant too was it to sit out in the veranda of an evening, with a cool breeze blowing in fresh and strong from the desert, watching the moon slowly rise over the great black mountain at the foot of the pass, throwing the weirdest effects of light and shade over the dark valley and frowning crenellated walls of the sleeping city, for all was quiet as a rule by ten o'clock, and not a sound to be heard but the cry of the watch, or at hourly intervals, the beating of a gong at the Great Gate. We almost regretted, at such times, that our days in China were drawing to a close. One feels a pang of regret on leaving even the most disagreeable countries, and we had assuredly nothing to complain of in this so-called barbarous land, where, save on one occasion, we had met with nothing

but civility and kindness. Anticipation is usually either better or worse than realization, and we looked forward with no little anxiety to the journey across the desert of Gobi—with no signs of vegetation, no settled habitations or fellow-beings to break the monotony or disturb the solitude of the long and weary thirty-five days' journey that lay between us and the Russian frontier.

Though the days were hot at Kalgan, the nights were cool and pleasant. Our rest was somewhat disturbed, though, by Ivanoff's clerks, who shared the apartment next ours, and gave us a nightly concert that began about half past ten, and lasted till an indefinite hour in the morning. Their instrument was a kind of half banjo, half concertina, very popular in Siberia, which has a melancholy, though not unpleasing, sound. Both men were Siberians, one a native of Irkoutsk, and the other of Kiakhta, and, like all their countrymen, had a rooted antipathy to going to bed. I do not believe they ever slept at all, for I once woke about 4 a.m., and one of them, even at that hour, was reading out loud to the other. Neither could speak a word of English, or, in-

deed, any language but Russian and Mongolian. They came rushing into our room one night to say there was a large wolf in the yard at the back of the house. We loaded a rifle and hurried out, but only just in time to see the beast vanish over the wall in the moonlight. The outskirts of Kalgan are infested with these brutes at night, and even in the daytime children have been carried off; but we never saw another till we got into Siberia.

The camels arrived on the tenth day, four days sooner than we expected them, and we set about making our preparations for a start without further delay. The caravan was, according to Ivanoff's arrangement, to consist of sixteen camels, three carts, and three ponies, under the escort of three Mongol guides. We found it quite hopeless to attempt to pronounce their names, so christened them, for purposes of identification, Moses, Aaron, and Sylvia, the latter from his striking, though somewhat grotesque, likeness to a burlesque actress of that name who graces the boards of the Gaiety Theatre in London. Though Sylvia was a pleasant-looking, good-tempered boy of about twenty, his companions

were positively repulsive. I have seldom seen a more villainous-looking cut-throat individual than Aaron, but luckily his looks belied him. Each wore the Mongol costume, a loose, long gown, thickly coated all down the front with mutton fat, grease, and other abominations, for a Mongol's coat is his dinner-napkin. All were armed with short, ugly-looking knives, while Moses, in his capacity of leader, carried a rusty horse-pistol which looked as if it had been made about the same date as the Great Wall, and which would probably have done him far more injury than his opponent, had it gone off.

The transit of the Desert of Gobi is accomplished by the regular heavy Russian post (established 1860) in something under twenty-five days from Kiakhta, but we expected to take considerably longer. The post caravans are under the direction of experienced Mongol mail-men and Cossacks, who know the road to an inch, although there is, of course, no beaten track to guide them. Our guides were of a somewhat primitive order, and as we afterwards discovered, often considerably out both as to time and distance. Some Chinese tea-merchants strolled into the yard the day before we

left, while we were getting the packing-cases settled evenly on the camels' backs. They evidently did not think much of our caravan, and more than one of them, Jee Boo told me, openly expressed an opinion that we should never get across with such weak camels and inexperienced men. Truly we could not have chosen a worse time to start so far as the strength of the camels was concerned. As to the men, I felt we must take our chance, but I was somewhat uneasy, and did not enjoy the excellent dinner (our last civilized meal for some time) that Ivanoff provided for us so much as I should have done under ordinary circumstances. It was too late now, however, to make any alterations, and we retired to rest earlier than usual, so as to make an early start in the morning for Da-Hun-Go, the last settlement or hamlet on the Chinese side before the desert city of Ourga (600 miles distant) is reached.

Ivanoff was to accompany us as far as our first halting-place, about twenty miles distant. The carts had already started when, at 10.30 (on the morning of the 8th of July), we set out for Da-Hun-Go. Just as we were about to mount, a white-clad figure appeared, surmounted by an enormous straw hat, which when removed disclosed

the perspiring and beaming features of our old naval friend, Captain Lew Buah. This necessitated a further adjournment to the house, where the captain drank success to our expedition in Vodka, and made an appointment to dine with us in London in two years' time. I sincerely hope the old fellow has since obtained his pardon, and returned to his vocation, for which, as far as regards pluck, he was certainly well fitted.

It was a bright and lovely morning. The first hour or two of our journey lay through the dry river-bed—or caravan road—on which we passed many strings of bullock-carts, but few camels. About nine miles from Kalgan, and half-way to Dah-Hun-Go, we passed "Tutinza," a Mongol word signifying "Cave Town." Tutinza, which contained about eight hundred inhabitants, could not have been better named, as the houses are literally built into the sides of the hill, and are roofless, although they belonged to well-to-do Chinamen, and were well and even luxuriously furnished inside; while here and there among them were pretty flower-gardens and clustering vines. Seen from a distance, the appearance of the blue and white clad figures moving about among the pathways intersecting the caves was very

curious. It looked like a huge ant-hill. Nearly opposite the village is "The Target of Tamerlan," a mountain about three or four hundred feet high, the summit of which is perforated by a clean-cut circular aperture about thirty feet in diameter, plainly visible from the road below. A freak of nature, no doubt; but the Mongols say that this hole was made by an arrow shot by the Tartar hero. Jee Boo derisively remarked to Moses that Tamerlan must have had a very large bow, which only elicited a grunt in reply, and made our leader look, if possible, more ill-tempered and villainous than ever.

The long rest at Kalgan had put our ponies in rare trim, and when we had left the rocky valley and got on to the grass plains that bound the valley of Da-Hun-Go, they tore away with us at a pace that it took Ivanoff, who was riding an antiquated steed purchased from a Cossack courier, all his time to keep up with us. Before reaching the plains, we ascended for the last time the ridge of mountainous rocks separating China from the plains of Mongolia. There is a gradual rise of about fifteen hundred feet from Kalgan to Da-Hun-Go, from which point the desert extends, flat and unbroken, with the exception of gentle undulations, and a few

ridges of rock, to the borders of Siberia. So steep was the ascent that we had to get off and lead our ponies, and though only three hundred feet high, it took the carts nearly two hours to accomplish it. Halfway up we met a caravan of bullock-carts, each with three or four men hanging on behind with ropes to act as breaks. Even with these precautions two or three lay smashed to pieces on the road-side. It is a curious fact, seeing the rough work they go through, that these vehicles are built entirely of wood, and have not a scrap of iron or other metal in their construction. About four o'clock we came to a dilapidated, crumbling wall about fifteen feet in height, a branch of the Great Wall of China, which, running at right angles to it for about thirty miles, forms the boundary between Inner Mongolia and China. A kind of gap or gate fifteen to twenty feet broad, marked the caravan road. Passing through this, we turned and looked our last on the Chinese Empire, and by five o'clock had reached our camping-ground, a green stretch of meadow-land, watered by a clear running stream, on the borders of which cattle, sheep, and ponies were grazing.

Half a dozen brick and wooden houses composed the village of Da-Hun-Go. While the tents were

being struck, we strolled out with our guns, but though we saw plenty of game, duck, snipe, and a species of moor-hen in plenty, we could get nowhere near them. We would willingly have stayed here a day, but that the Mongols when once off are as hard to stop as a switchback railway until they have reached their destination, long or short as the journey may be. On our return we found the fires lit and a comfortable meal prepared for us by Jee Boo. Ivanoff stayed the night, and slept in the tent, but we preferred doubling up in our carts, the night being so cold, that one was glad of a thick sheepskin even in the close, stuffy vehicles. We slept soundly, lulled by the murmur of the brook, and were rather loth to move, when Jee Boo brought us the matutinal cup of cocoa and a biscuit. But the camels were already packed, and although it was then only six, the indefatigable Ivanoff had been up an hour superintending everything and giving final instructions for our comfort and safety to the Mongols, an utterly useless proceeding, I afterwards thought, when I got to know this unique race better, for whatever is said to them, except for their own benefit, invariably goes in at one ear and out of the other.

We left Da-Hun-Go at seven o'clock, taking leave

of our kindly host with much the same feeling that a man experiences when embarking for the first time on a long sea voyage, with the difference that we had but a very faint notion of when we should reach port, and but a very vague idea of the hardships and fatigue to be undergone before we regained comparative civilization at Kiakhta. At length all was ready. The tent and water-barrels packed, carts harnessed, and ponies saddled. Moses, mounting a wiry little beast about twelve hands high, led the way, while Aaron took the lead on the foremost camel, Sylvia bringing up the rear and hunting up the stragglers, who were continually breaking loose from the line as they stooped to gather the sweet fresh pasture through which we travelled. A final squeeze of the hand to Ivanoff, a crack of Moses' heavy whip, and the caravan slowly moved away to the deep boom-booming of the camel bells, a music which, though it sounded musical and pleasing enough at first, we were heartily, hopelessly sick and tired of long before reaching Ourga. As we turned a corner of the road and took a last look at the vanishing figure of our friend and host, it was with a feeling of loneliness and depression, hardly wonderful, perhaps, when we

realized that for nearly one thousand miles in distance and more than a month in time we should see no other Europeans, and very few natives. Nor was it reassuring to think that we were for the next month entirely at the mercy of the three ragged, villainous-looking individuals who constituted our escort, and who might, if they so pleased, murder, rob, or desert us with impunity, so far as any fear of punishment was concerned. Siberia, to say nothing of Russia and France, seemed very far away on that bright July morning as we slowly started off, on the first important stage of the long land journey from Pekin to Calais.

We were nearly four hours getting out of the valley of Da-Hun-Go, one of the prettiest bits of scenery we passed during the whole of our voyage. The ravine itself is a little over a mile broad, with low undulating green hills on either side. Flocks of sheep dotted their sides, and an occasional red and gold Buddhist temple flashed in the sun on their summits and broke the sky-line. Through the centre of the valley ran a tumbling, foaming brook alive with trout, its banks fringed with sweet-smelling flowers, and about fifty yards from its brink the brown, well-trodden caravan road

which from here to the borders of the desert proper is well defined. One might have been in one of the loveliest parts of England. Wild hyacinths, cowslips, wild dog-roses, periwinkles, and daisies grew on all sides in the long, sweet grass through which our ponies almost laboured knee-deep, while in the distance the low sweet notes of a cuckoo heightened the illusion, and recalled lovely bits of scenery in Devonshire or Wales.

We halted for an hour, about two o'clock, for a tin of preserved meat and glass of cold whisky and water. Moses intimated to us through Jee Boo his intention of pushing on and gaining the desert before nightfall, so there was no help for it. I did not wish to begin the journey with a disturbance, and made no demur, and three o'clock saw us again on the march, passing through plains of wheat and barley, and enormous fields or enclosures of mustard and poppies. We saw no habitations, and wondered a good deal where the tillers of all this ground reside. The road got worse towards evening, and the heavy, clumsy carts stuck fast several times in the deep, rotten holes with which it was honeycombed. A little before six o'clock we got into a more desolate-looking country, although it was better travelling,

DA-HUN-GO.

which was perhaps lucky, as the stiff work in the marshes had almost done up our camels. I had yet to learn that the more beat these animals look, the fitter they are.

We now passed through a sterile, burnt-up-looking country, thickly covered with clumps of thick, wiry grass, over which the camel carts plunged and rolled in a very painful manner. I retired to my cart about five o'clock for a rest, and, tired out with my long ride in the sun, fell asleep. The sun was low in the heavens when I awoke and looked out of the little window. All traces of vegetation had vanished, while straight in front of us rose a low range of yellow sand-hills, through which stunted wisps of light green grass struggled at intervals. On the near side of these were a couple of circular tents, some dogs, and ponies standing hard by; on the far side of the sand-hills the sea, or what appeared so exactly like it, that I had to rub my eyes to make sure I was not dreaming. There it was; the great grey waste looking exactly as it does when lit up at sunset, by the rays of the setting sun after a hot summer's day in England. The low yellow sand-hills, too, heightened the illusion, and stood out clear and distinct against the grey

expanse and level, unbroken horizon. At this moment my ruminations were rudely broken in upon by Moses. Appearing suddenly at the side of my cart, he thrust his flat, ill-favoured face in at the window, and extending a long, skinny forefinger, pointed to the darkening waste. "Shamo,"[1] he muttered in a hoarse, guttural voice. Then I knew we had reached the confines of the "Great Hungry Desert."

[1] Mongol name for Gobi Desert.

CHAPTER V.

THE DESERT OF GOBI.

THE population of Mongolia, an elevated plateau lying about four thousand feet above sea-level, is roughly estimated at between three and four millions, but the difficulties of obtaining anything like an accurate census of the tribes inhabiting this vast tableland are obvious. Of this number, over thirty thousand inhabit Urga, the capital and residence of the "Kootookta," or living God of the Mongol religion, "Buddhism." The power of this human deity is purely nominal. He is allowed to reign on sufferance by the Emperor of China, who governs, more or less nominally, the whole of Mongolia, from the Siberian frontier to the mountains of Tibet. The Mongol Tartars pay tax, though somewhat irregularly, to the Pekin Government, the native khans or princes being responsible for the revenues of their several "khanates" or districts.

The name "Gobi" is given by the Mongols to any

district more or less destitute of water, but the desert, where we crossed it, presents but few of the characteristics with which we usually associate the name. It may better be described as a vast plain or steppe, extending from the northern side of the Great Wall of China to the Russian frontier-town of Kiakhta, a distance of over eight hundred miles. With the exception, however, of about fifty miles of sandy waste midway across, the north-western portion is seldom entirely devoid of vegetation of some sort or another, be it rich, luxuriant pasture, or dry withered scrub. Perhaps the most curious thing about this so-called desert is, that although grass is so plentiful, and in many places wild flowers grow in profusion, water is very scarce. In the summer months frequent and heavy rain storms do much to lessen this evil, but the Tartars suffer terribly at times from the drought, which sometimes lasts a year or more. Notwithstanding, the climate is healthy, and serious epidemics, such as cholera or typhus, unknown.

There are three caravan routes from the Great Wall to Urga. Along each of these wells have been dug eight to ten feet deep, and at intervals of twenty to thirty miles; but we found the water

in most of them thick and brackish, in many undrinkable, and had every reason to be sorry, long before we reached Urga, that we had not laid in a larger stock of soda-water at Shanghai.

Our guides were not cheerful companions. Moses seldom spoke, Aaron never. Sylvia, however, was the life and soul of the caravan. His spirits never flagged for an instant, and whenever he could talk to no one else, he would hold long conversations in a loud tone with the camel he bestrode, occasionally bursting into song. The Mongols do not squeak when they sing, as the Chinese do, but their voices are as harsh and inharmonious as their songs, which are generally in the minor key, and very doleful and depressing.

I will not weary the reader with a daily description of the scenery passed between Kalgan and Urga. It may be described in very few words: Fourteen days of undulating grass plain, monotonous and unbroken, save by an occasional "Yourt"[1] or encampment, four days of deep, sandy desert interspersed with two ridges of rock, one hundred and fifty to two hundred feet high, so steep as to be almost impracticable for the carts. Five more days

[1] A Mongol tent or encampment.

of green plain with intervals of gravel, thickly covered with the brightly coloured transparent stones, for which Gobi is famous. Such is a brief but sufficient description of the twenty-three days we occupied in reaching Urga. But for the tract of sandy desert half-way, nothing meets the eye, day after day, week after week, but one long dreary succession of waves of plain, which reminded me of nothing so much as the ocean. Not a solitary object, animate or inanimate, broke the dull, desolate landscape save when at rare intervals we sighted a Tartar tent, gleaming white in the sunshine, and looking in the far distance like some white sea-bird asleep on the billows of this huge sea of verdure. Beyond the capital, however, the country becomes more accentuated, and there are woods, mountains, and rivers, to gladden the eye after the long, monotonous desert journey, of which we were heartily sick long before we reached the sacred city of the Kootookta.

I fondly imagined I had reached the acme of discomfort and misery in a mule-litter, but the latter is a bed of roses compared to the boxes of human suffering in which we crossed Mongolia. Imagine a kind of oblong vehicle, eight feet long by three wide, and four feet high, the body of the cart of

rough unpainted wood, the roof or covering of canvas, thickly smeared with Chinese varnish, which in wet, or very hot weather, exuded the most intolerable smell. Two doors with small square holes therein, let in the air and light (also occasionally the rain), while a mattress and a couple of large feather pillows acted as a buffer, without which one's body and head would in a very short time have been one mass of bruises. To say that these somewhat primitive vehicles shake would be incorrect. They leap and bound even on a fairly good road, beating and pounding the wretched inmate into a jelly; over stony ground it is next to impossible to remain in them for any length of time without a splitting headache, and a feeling as if every individual bone in one's body had been torn from its socket and put back again. I do not wish my bitterest enemy a worse fate than a night of rough caravan work in Mongolia. We often walked till one in the morning, in preference to the intolerable shaking, which affected the nerves and mind almost as much as it injured the body.

With the exception of a forty-eight hours' rest at Urga, the day's work never varied, from the time we left Kalgan till we rode through the Russian out-

posts at Kiakhta. At daybreak (between five and six a.m.) Sylvia would gallop off on a pony and bring in the camels which, turned loose at the halt, had strayed away in search of pasture till, at sunrise, some of them were mere specks on the horizon. Breakfast (a cup of cocoa and a biscuit) over, the caravan was usually well under weigh by half-past six. The pace was not exhilarating, it seldom attained the rate of three miles an hour, never exceeded it. We then travelled on, riding or walking, till two o'clock p.m., when tents were pitched, and, if near a well, the water-barrels filled. The midday meal consisted of a tin of preserved meat and rice, or, if in a game district, a duck or sand-grouse sometimes enlivened this somewhat sad meal. At five o'clock we were on the move again till one or two in the morning, only halting about nine o'clock for a quarter of an hour, to unsaddle the ponies and swallow a cup of Valentine's meat juice. I do not know what we should have done without this preparation. On a journey of this kind, where the fatigue is so great and cooking impossible, it is simply invaluable.

We thus got about four hours' actual rest in the twenty-four, for in the carts, while in motion, sleep

was out of the question. I have often since wondered how the ponies stood it. Camels are, of course, used to such long exhausting journeys, though, strangely enough, the loss of a camel was our only casualty.

We got on fairly well for two or three days, but after the first week experienced a sense of oppression and weariness very hard to shake off, and the dull, dead monotony of the eternal green steppes began to tell upon the mind and spirits. We met but once a day as a rule, and even then, like the parrot, spoke little and thought much; indeed we had nothing to talk about, for with the exception of an occasional yourt there was not one solitary object to distract the mind for a moment, or interrupt the depressing aspect of the waves of plain that extend between Kalgan and Urga. We even welcomed the region of sand in mid-desert. It was a change, at any rate, and there were rocks to look at, though, on the other hand, the work was harder and the distance accomplished each day considerably less.

Perhaps the most striking peculiarity about Gobi is the dead silence that reigns over its vast surface. At night the bright, unwavering lights of the Great Bear, and soft glimmer of Cassiopeia and

the Pleiades stood out with a distinctness rarely seen in other latitudes. I often lay awake and watched them, too tired to sleep, till the lightening horizon heralded the dawn of another dreary, uneventful day, and warned one that another hour at most would see us off again on our weary journey. I had never, till I spent a night out on the waste, thoroughly realized the words of the poet :—

> And round me all in utter darkness lies,
> No sound, no form, no message, and no sign,
> Only the silence of the far-off skies
> And stars that thro' the darkness calmly shine.

It was not till the morning of the fifth day out from Saram Bolousar that we sighted a yourt on the horizon and encamped within a mile of it at dinner-time. There were but half-a-dozen tents in all, containing the filthiest and most repulsive beings I have ever beheld.

The majority were, unfortunately for us, not the least troubled with shyness, and took forcible possession of our tent and carts, notwithstanding the indignant protestations of Jee Boo. Remonstrance was useless. It would have been contrary to the rules of desert etiquette to turn them out, and might have got us into trouble. It was

a hot day, and so closely were they packed about the tent-doorway that not a breath of air could reach us, yet we suffered in silence, though the smell from the greasy rags in which the poor wretches were clothed was well-nigh unbearable. We must have seen from first to last about a hundred natives, but I was sadly disappointed, I must own, in the Mongolian Tartar. I had pictured him a wild, fierce-looking fellow, bristling with knives and firearms, and leading a wild, romantic existence, of which privation and danger formed a daily part. I found him a mild, stupid-looking individual, lazy, good-tempered, dirty—not to say filthy—in appearance and habits, and addicted to petty theft when there was no fear of being found out.

The men are of middle size, muscular and stoutly built, with thick lips and small beady black eyes. Naturally fair, the combined effects of sun, argol smoke, and last, but not least, dirt give to most of them the hue of a negro. Their women are plain and, as a rule, virtuous. Infidelity is rare in Mongolia, and when it does occur the injured husband is easily consoled by payment of a few sheep or a camel or two. The Mongolian woman's lot is not a happy one. Unlike their Kirghiz brothers, the Mongolian

Tartars have no respect whatever for their wives, of which they are allowed any number, though the first married takes precedence over the others. They are treated more as slaves than companions, and do all the real hard work of the yourt, from catching the camels to disembowelling a sheep! The men, as a rule, live longer than the women. The latter suffer more from disease, although, with the exception of a kind of influenza prevalent in summer, epidemics are unknown in Mongolia.

The Mongol Tartar is essentially a nomad, and seldom stationary for more than a year at a time, but for ever on the move, roving hither and thither over the great plain in search of pasture and water for his flocks and herds. His "yourt" or tent is admirably adapted to his wild, erratic life, being so constructed that it can be taken down and packed on a camel's back in less than an hour. The "yourts" are circular in shape, and simply consist of two layers of thick felt stretched over a wooden framework secured by stout leather thongs. They are about five feet high, and eighteen feet in diameter. A hole cut in the centre of the conical roof lets out the smoke of a fire, which day and night is kept alight for cooking purposes. The

Mongol has no fixed time for his meals. He eats when he feels hungry, and as often in the middle of the night as the day. In winter the roof aperture is closed, and the smoke allowed to escape as best it may through the chinks and crannies in the felt. The fuel used is not wood (for no wood grows in Gobi), but "argol" or dried camels' dung, the smoke of which is much more dense and pungent, and most of the Mongols suffer from sore eyes in consequence. The furniture of a yourt is simple enough; half-a-dozen sheepskin rugs, a flat iron pan to cook in, a large box containing the goods and chattels of the family, surmounted by an image of Buddha and two or three prayer-wheels; there is little or no room for more. Some of the yourts are better furnished than others, those for example belonging to the khans or princes. The latter are resplendent inside and out with gold, silver, and costly silks; but these are rarely met with by the casual traveller.

With the exception of gluttony the Mongol has few vices. Drunkenness is rare. It is only when the mares are milked and "airak" brewed that they exceed in this respect; but when they do, it is with a will, a whole yourt being given up

to drunkenness and debauch for two or three days together. "Airak" is the only intoxicant known to the Mongols, if we except the strong fiery whisky sometimes imported among them by Chinese traders. Dirt is their other failing. I can safely say I have never seen, or even read of a race so loathsome in their appearance and habits as the Mongols. Men and women alike seem to revel in it, and most of them present more the appearance of perambulating bundles of filthy rags than human beings. It was not till we reached Urga, and met some of the better class, that we were able to distinguish what the Mongol costume really is, viz. a kind of loose dressing-gown reaching just below the knee, secured by an ornamented silver belt, a pair of baggy breeches stuffed into a pair of Chinese half-boots with felt soles, the whole surmounted by a broad-brimmed black felt hat, not unlike a sailor's hat in shape, with long silk streamers. In winter the poor Mongol is smothered in sheepskins, the rich in furs from Siberia. At a distance the women are indistinguishable from the men, the only perceptible difference being that the former wear no belt (the Mongol name for woman signifies literally the "unbelted one"), while

all wear a head-dress, a kind of tiara of Chinese manufacture, made of silver and red and blue stones, which look like, but are not, turquoises and coral. A Mongol lady never does her hair more than once every two months or so. It is kept in position by a kind of thick glue, and dressed so as to stand out two or three inches on either side of the head at right angles. The result of this practice in dwellings so infested with vermin as the Mongol yourts may be left to the imagination.

The wealth of a Mongol Tartar consists exclusively of camels, sheep, and ponies, for there is no industry, no manufacture of any kind in Mongolia. The ponies are wonderfully well suited to endure the long, distressing voyages their owners are continually making. Though small and slightly built, the amount of fatigue these little beasts will undergo is something incredible. Nothing seems to tire them, and our own, "Chow" and "Karra," arrived at Kiakhta as fit and sound as when we left the Great Wall, although they had but five hours' rest out of the twenty-four for over a month, and for nearly a quarter of that time were on a short allowance of water. The worth of a pony in Gobi varies from 8*l.* to 10*l.*, or its equivalent in brick tea, for money is unknown

in Mongolia, and the currency at present consists solely of this somewhat cumbersome article. We passed two or three droves of 400 or 500 ponies each on our way across, which were being sent to Kalgan for export to Pekin, Shanghai, and other parts of China. Accompanying one of these was a "Mongolized" German, Herr R——, who twenty years ago settled in Mongolia and has made a large fortune buying and exporting ponies. We should never have known him for a European, dressed as he was *à la Tartare*, and the "*Guten Tag*," with which he greeted us, sounded strangely out of place.

The Mongols never shoe their ponies, nor do they groom them. The mane and tail is allowed to grow so long as to almost trail on the ground, the Tartars saying that the length of these appendages keeps them warm in winter, and wards off flies in the hot season; also, in case of a broken bridle or stirrup-leather, there is always the horse-hair handy to mend it with!

The ways of these little beasts are at first somewhat confusing to a stranger. It took me some time to get used to "Karra's" favourite tricks, such as stopping to scratch his ear with his hind-leg, sitting down like a dog, and occasionally rolling

without a moment's warning, when we came to a more than ordinarily tempting bit of grass. He was certainly the cleverest pony I have ever seen out of a circus, and as sweet-tempered as he was mischievous. I shall never forget when, the first day after antelope, I attempted to guide him through the rat-holes and mole-hills that thickly cover the central parts of the desert. We had not gone ten lengths before, getting his head well down, he set to kicking and bucking with such a will, that I expected every instant to see the girths snap and the saddle sent flying! Moses, galloping alongside, motioned me to drop the reins on his neck. The effect was instantaneous, for he immediately became as quiet as a lamb, and bounded away again with a snort and shake of his game little head, as much as to say, "The idea of this idiot trying to teach *me* my way over the desert!" "Karra" never once gave me a fall, nor made a mistake, although this novel mode of riding at full gallop over rough ground, with one's hands in one's pockets, required some nerve at first.

We were later than usual in getting away the evening of our halt in the Tartar encampment, for a sheep was given us by our unwelcome guests in ex-

change for a couple of soda-water bottles. These are especially prized by the Mongols, probably on account of their, to them, strange shape. The task of slaying the animal was relegated to Sylvia, who proceeded to his work in true Tartar fashion. First making a huge gash in its side with his large clasp-knife, he thrust in his hand, and seizing the heart stopped its movements. The animal was then skinned, and the entrails, after being washed, carefully put aside; nothing was wasted. We reserved the legs for ourselves, and Moses and Co. proceeded to devour the rest. From the time it was killed to when they were licking the last remnants from the bones took them just two hours; they ate it half raw. The sheep on Gobi are small and pure white, with long pendent black ears, and an enormous tail weighing eight to ten pounds. This lump of fat is considered a delicacy, and always given to the favoured guest in a "yourt." The mutton was excellent, not unlike Southdown.

We got but little rest that night. Our guests had left us a souvenir in the shape of certain nameless animals that stuck to us faithfully the remainder of our journey to Kiakhta. We had hitherto congratulated ourselves on there being no

mosquitoes, but soon realized that a whole army of the latter would have been preferable to the noisome insects that, two or three days afterwards, swarmed in the carts, and gave us no peace, night or day. Their smell was worse than their bite, and I think this was, perhaps, the greatest discomfort we had to put up with on the desert journey, always excepting the fatigue and semi-starvation.

We passed and saw nothing for the following three days, although it was interesting to note the curious waves of vegetation and animal life that we crossed at intervals. For a couple of miles the ground would be a perfect network of rat-holes, to give place, in turn, to a district covered with bright black and yellow lizards. Then thousands of beetles covered the plain—large, long-legged things, with bodies as big as a cockroach, and striped with red and black bars; then rats again, and so on, but the rats were in the majority. In many places the plain was alive with them; you trod on them as you walked. The Gobi rat is peculiar to Mongolia. He is a soft, pretty little animal, with a feathery tail, and has none of the disgusting attributes of the common Norwegian or English rat.

It was the same with the vegetation. Each flower or herb seemed to have its own district, though one kind of weed was noticeable everywhere, in the barren as in the most fertile parts. Not being a naturalist, I cannot give its name, but in appearance it is exactly like the weed that grows in such luxuriance at the bottom of our fresh-water ponds and canals in England, where it is called "Babington's curse," from the fact that it was originally imported by a person of that name in America. When crushed it emits a sweet scent like thyme, and on clear, cool nights the scent was almost overpowering when the carts and camels had passed over it.

Another flower very common in Gobi is the white convolvulus, which grows almost everywhere like the herb mentioned above. Among the rarer sort were a pretty lilac-coloured daisy with a yellow centre, the common dandelion, and in some parts the English daisy. Rarest of any was a pink flower growing on a prickly bush about a foot high, exactly like a miniature hawthorn-tree in full bloom. It had a sweet but rather sickly perfume.

The seventh day out we met the heavy Russian

mail—five camels in charge of two Cossacks and a Tartar. The latter were cheery, good-tempered fellows, and seemed to be taking it easy, each astride a camel, with red flannel shirts, bare legs and feet, and nothing to show they were Russian soldiers but the flat, white, peakless cap with which Vereschagin's pictures have made us familiar. We gave them a drink a-piece, and sent them on their way rejoicing, but with an expression of wonder on their jolly, sunburnt faces—wonder, not unmingled with pity, for the poor, mad Englishmen who were doing this journey for pleasure!

We entered at sunset a part of the desert literally covered with enormous mole-hills, some as much as two or three feet in height. Being pitch-dark, we had a rough time of it in the carts, for the feeble glimmer of the paper-lantern attached to each only sufficed to make darkness visible, and it was almost impossible to steer clear of the huge mounds. After several narrow escapes of an upset, we got out and walked, about ten o'clock, and had an uncomfortable night of it, for about 10.30 a fine, drizzling rain commenced to fall, which lasted till we encamped at midnight. Walking was little better, and resulted in some terrible croppers,

for we could not see an inch before us. A good stiff glass of whisky and water and a rest of six hours soon put things right, though we felt a good deal beat the next morning, when at 6.30 we were roused by the inexorable Sylvia.

We encamped the next day near a yourt of considerable size. Moses having informed us that the chief or head-man was a Lama of some importance, we sent up to his tent, a gaudy-looking edifice, surmounted by half a dozen red and yellow prayer-flags, to ask if we might call and pay our respects, a request that was immediately granted. This was the largest yourt we saw, and was composed of over twenty tents.

We rode off after dinner, accompanied by Jee Boo, who, on the way, instructed us how to behave, for the forms and ceremonies that have to be gone through when visiting a Tartar domicile are, to a stranger, somewhat confusing. For instance, a Mongolian never dreams of walking up to a strange yourt. Not only is it contrary to custom, but dangerous, on account of the huge dogs kept about every tent for the protection of the women and children when the men are from home. A Russian Cossack, ignorant of this, went up to a yourt on

foot a few years since, and was torn in pieces by the savage brutes, which are, in size and appearance, very much like an English mastiff.

Arrived within earshot of the yourt, we reined up, Jee Boo shouting out loudly, "Nohai Harai," or "Tie up the dogs." Several women then emerged from the lama's tent, and secured the brutes, after which we rode up, and handing our ponies over to the care of a rather pretty, dark-eyed Tartar girl, entered the tent in somewhat undignified fashion on all fours. The door was too low to admit us in any other fashion. Our sticks, revolvers, and knives were laid on the ground outside. It would be as great a breach of good manners to enter a Mongol tent armed or with a stick in your hand as a drawing-room with your hat on, the idea being, that while under his roof, your host is responsible for your safety. You do not require to defend yourself. There were, save the lama, no men about, and we afterwards heard they were away on a hunting expedition in quest of antelope. It was some time before we could make out the lama, for the sunshine outside was dazzling, and the interior of the tent in almost total darkness. The great man, who was lying on a kind of divan, and

surrounded by four or five women, did not rise when we entered, but lazily extended a moist and dirty hand as a sign that we might shake hands with him, which having done, we seated ourselves on his right and left. He was a fat, pasty-faced individual, clad in a long gown of faded yellow silk, the front of which was stiff with the grease and dirt of years. His bullet head was, after the manner of lamas, shaved; and round his neck was hung a huge brass ornament, of rough workmanship.

Having motioned us to a seat, the lama made a long speech, of which we could understand nothing, nor could, I believe, Jee Boo, although he told us it was replete with good wishes and compliments. The Mongol language is a difficult one, and even our interpreter, who had studied it for years, could only speak it in a very rudimentary way. One peculiarity of the Mongol tongue is that, unless you say a word *exactly* as it is pronounced, you might as well address them in Sanskrit or double-Dutch. As an instance of this, an American missionary at Kalgan was good enough to teach me a word of the greatest importance in the desert: "Tie up your dogs." He pronounced it "No high, Ha-

rū" (*sic*), but when I tried this, it failed signally, and the Mongols could make nothing of it for a long time. At last a light dawned on them. "Nohoi Haré, oh, we understand that!" I could not help thinking, after this, that the Gospel must have rather a poor chance in Mongolia!

The interior of the tent was comfortable enough, though the argol smoke got into one's eyes and made them smart for days after. The floor was strewn with thick, soft Chinese rugs and tapestries, apparently of great value, while round the sides of the tent were hung large pieces of bright silk, covered with Chinese and Tibetan characters—probably prayers. Directly in front of the entrance was a kind of altar, painted red, upon which reposed a huge gilt image of Buddha surrounded by half-a-dozen prayer-wheels, to which whenever they passed them, the inmates of the yourt gave a vigorous turn. The amount of prayers they must have got through, even during our short visit, was something marvellous, for the wheels were incessantly on the go, from the time we entered the tent till we left it. In the centre, and directly opposite the entrance, a huge copper cauldron, three parts

full of a dirty, yellow-coloured liquid, simmered on a brazier of argol, the only fuel used in this part of Mongolia, where no wood grows.

Having smelt and returned the inevitable snuff-bottle, we murmured "mendu" "good-day," and relapsed into silence, waiting for the Lama to recommence the conversation. The snuff-bottle is an infallible sign of a Mongol's wealth and position. No conversation is ever carried on without a preliminary sniff, which is more a matter of form than anything else, as they often contain nothing. From the head Lama to the poorest Mongol no Tartar is ever without one. Most are of Pekin manufacture, ranging in value from a few cash to two hundred taels or more, the best ones being of gold or jade encrusted with precious stones, the commoner sort of glass or china. Attached to the stopper is a small bone or ivory spoon with which the snuff (when there is any) is ladled into the nostrils.

A good ten minutes elapsed before the Lama showed any desire to enter into conversation, and we were about to take our departure when the pretty Tartar girl came bustling into the tent and

brought us some tea (or a concoction of that name) out of the copper cauldron. Seeing that we looked at the greasy-looking stuff rather askance, the Mongol gave a sort of grunt and held his thumb up, an operation that was repeated by the women around him. This I learnt from Jee Boo means "good," holding it down in the manner of the Romans when they desired the death of a gladiator "bad." So we were forced to drink it, though with reluctance, especially as I had noticed that the Mongols, as a rule, follow Jack Sprat's example and lick the platter clean! The shallow wooden cups, out of which we drank, were literally encrusted with dirt, but it would never have done to refuse, so we gulped the nauseous mixture of brick tea, millet, and mutton-fat down. Never shall I forget it. That was the only cup of real Mongol tea I ever tasted, but it was some days before I got the flavour out of my mouth. The Lama seemed to enjoy it, though, and put away quite a dozen cups during the interview.

The beverage had one good effect; it loosened his tongue, and the following somewhat erratic dialogue, through the medium of Jee Boo, now took place between us:—

Lama: "Who and what are you, and where do you come from?"

Jee Boo: "They are English, and come from a great country far away beyond the seas."

Lama: "*What* are you?"

Jee Boo: "English!"

Lama: "You mean they are Russian (Rooski)."

Jee Boo: "No; English (roaring)."

Lama: "What nonsense; they are white! and all white men are Russians, so they must be." Silence; then, after a pause:—"*What* do you say you are?"

Jee Boo: "English. A country (he adds parenthetically) ruled over by a woman."

"Indeed!" replies the Lama, opening his little pig's-eyes in astonishment; then thoughtfully, and after a very long pause, "How many sheep has she got?"

This involved a mental and mathematical calculation rather beyond me, so I merely replied that her Majesty's wealth was so great, it could not be gauged by the domestic animal in question. My response was only met with a quiet smile of incredulity, and a remark that elicited loud laughter from the women. We inferred, as Jee

Boo did not join in the merriment, and would not tell us what it meant, that it was not complimentary.

Seeing the lama smoking, I lit a cigarette, and was about to replace the case in my pocket when our merry old host took it from my hand, and after carefully examining it, transferred it calmly but firmly into his own breeches' pocket. Presuming he would return it when we left, I thought no more of the matter, but at the close of our visit found he had every intention of keeping it as, he explained to Jee Boo, a *souvenir* of me. In vain I expostulated. "You can't possibly ask for it back," said Jee Boo, "it is the custom." The case was but a cheap leather one. Had it been of value, I should have rebelled, even though in mid desert. At any rate, I determined in future to make afternoon calls in Gobi with empty pockets. The name of this place, as far as I could gather, was "Ourouni." It is very hard in the desert to get at the right name of even a permanent yourt. The Mongols have a superstition that if they tell a stranger the name of their habitation, it will bring bad luck to the place. I have frequently asked three or four of the inmates of a yourt its name, and been answered a different

one by each. I gave it up at last as a bad job. The only yourt I was sure of throughout the journey was Toogoorook, and that was on our maps.

The sun was low in the heavens when we bid adieu to the Lama and took our departure. We were rather surprised to find on arriving in camp, the baggage on the ground, the ponies still unsaddled, the camels scattered about the plain in all directions, and Moses and Aaron clearly under the influence of "arak." As for Sylvia, he had taken up a position behind one of the carts *tête-à tête* with the pretty Tartar, who was plaiting his pigtail, and carrying on in a way that would somewhat have disconcerted her spouse had he suddenly arrived on the scene. Benedick would probably, however, not have minded much, for, as I have said, the Mongols are not jealous of their women. They greatly differ in this respect from the Kirghiz tartars, who will not allow a stranger even to look upon their wives. Their respective religions, Mahometanism and Buddhism, of course, account for this. The Kirghiz woman is always more or less under supervision, the Mongol may do as she pleases, go where she likes, and alone. Never-

theless, there is but little immorality among the latter. As much cannot be said for the followers of the Prophet further west.

Our faithful little henchman's face expanded into a broad grin as soon as he saw us. He was no bad judge of female beauty. The face and figure of the object of his affections would not have disgraced a European ball-room; while a fascinating half-savage half *naïve* manner enhanced her attractions not a little. It was only with great difficulty and by threats of complaining to the Lama that we separated the love-sick camel-driver from his lady-love. But, even then, she would not forsake him. Jumping on a pony as soon as we started, she rode alongside the caravan till the moon had fairly risen, and we were some miles from her home. It was not till nearly ten o'clock that she left us, after a tender parting with Sylvia (during which the caravan was left to its own devices), to gallop home alone in the moonlight to her yourt and lawful master.

Moses' pony showed such evident signs of breaking down that he exchanged it for a new one to-day. We witnessed the operation of selecting the animal from a drove of one hundred or so that

were feeding within a quarter of a mile or so of the yourt. Armed with a long slender pole with a noose at the end, one of the men rode out and, after a smart gallop, succeeded in lassoing a wiry-looking little chestnut and bringing it back to camp, when it was at once saddled. It was scarcely three years old, and had never been backed, yet in less than half an hour from when Moses mounted it was walking alongside the caravan as quietly and demurely as its predecessor. The facility and rapidity with which the Mongols break in their horses is something marvellous.

The Mongols, men, women, and children, are passionately fond of riding, and almost their sole pastime is horse, or rather pony racing, which the women, who sit cross-legged, join in as well as the men. That they are splendid riders is hardly to be wondered at, for they are in the saddle from morning till night. A Mongol never dreams of walking, even when going the shortest distances, as from one tent to another in camp. To their animals they are kindness itself, and I never once saw them strike a pony. Their seat is peculiar and ugly. Most of them ride crouching, like monkeys, leaning well over their pony's withers, and riding entirely with

the left hand, while the right arm is waved wildly about at full extent when they wish to increase their speed. As a rule, though, they are very merciful in this respect, and let their ponies take it easy, the ordinary pace being a sort of amble. We fortunately took the precaution of bringing our own saddles, for those used by the Mongols are made entirely of wood, and are hard, uncomfortable things, in shape something like a Turkish demi-pique, but about half the size. The bit used is something like our English ring-snaffle, the reins being made of thin leather thongs.

The following day was without incident except that, about sunset, we passed a series of cairns stretching away at intervals of about four hundred or five hundred yards to the horizon on either side of us. These are about fifteen feet in height, and formed of stones of various sizes, bleached camel-bones, feathers, and bits of rug, while at the top of each a dilapidated prayer-flag fluttered. We took them (as we afterwards discovered, rightly) for the boundary between Inner and Outer Mongolia. Although they are not marked on any Russian or English map, Ivanoff had told us to look out for them, as we should then be getting about half-way

to Ourga. As we passed them, Moses and Co. each cast a stone upon them as an offering to their divinity. No Mongol ever dreams of omitting to do this. Nothing else occurred to break the monotony of the day's march, but an occasional shot at a duck or sand-grouse, for we were now approaching the game country. There was little cover at first, but the next and three following days the desert was covered for miles around with thick, prickly bushes somewhat resembling furze, and here it fairly swarmed with sand-grouse, a pretty fawn-coloured bird with a black ring round the neck, and hairy legs. Most were plump, and in excellent condition, and we found them excellent eating. We must have seen thousands, and managed to bag nine brace in a couple of hours with no difficulty, merely walking a few yards away on either side of the carts, for they were not at all wild. We saw no other game except the largest hare I have ever seen, which I shot. Her size was explained when on preparing her for the pot, we found she was about to present the hare population of Gobi with an addition of five! The game was a welcome change to the tinned meats we had had to subsist on since leaving Kalgan, especially as the smart Yankee storekeeper,

from whom we had procured our stores at Shanghai, had managed to palm off a number of old and useless tins, some dating as far back as the year 1862, which were carefully packed away under the others, so that we did not open them till in mid desert. I can only trust, for his sake, that the wishes we expressed regarding his future state may never be realized.

With the exception of a kind of small antelope there is no big game in Mongolia proper, although hard by, in Manchuria, there are tiger and lion in plenty. The Gobi antelope is called by the Mongols literally, "Gooroosh," by the Chinese "Wang Yang," or yellow sheep. It is of a light fawn colour with white legs. We saw several herds of some hundreds each, but were only once able to get within shot, for owing to the flat nature of the ground they nearly always saw or heard us long before we could get near them. The only occasion on which we did so, was by the aid of a ridge of rocks. Our ponies, too, were not up to much galloping, although Karra was always ready, and keen as mustard for a hunt. But the Mongols declined to stay for us a moment, and the operation of keeping one eye on the game, and the other on

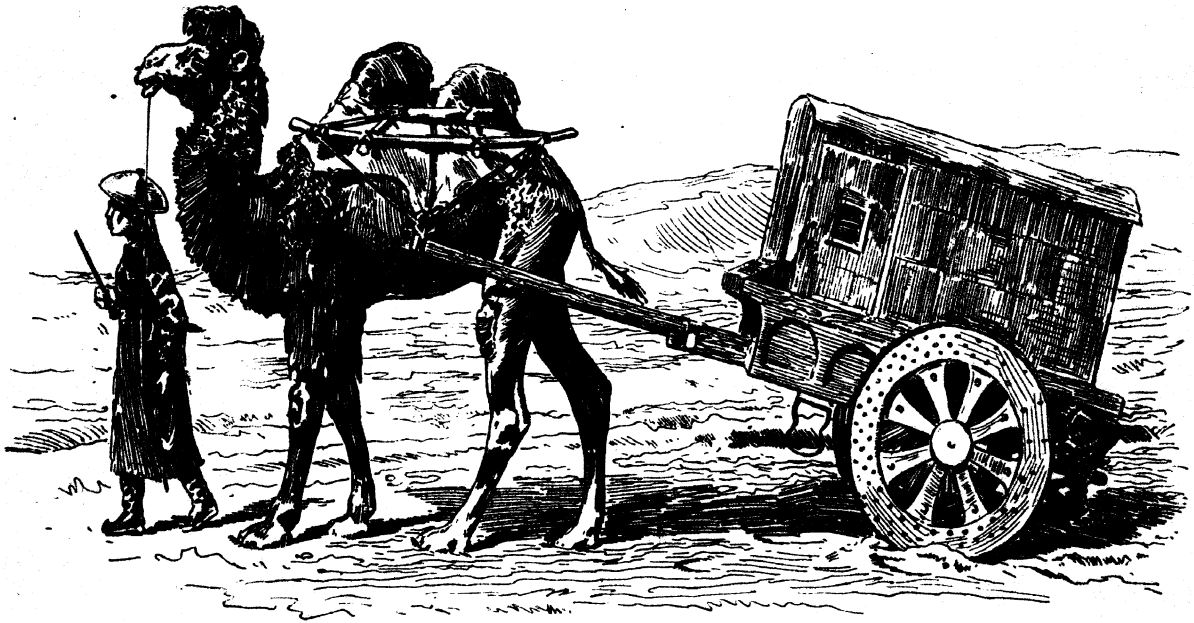
the caravan was somewhat fatiguing. With a properly organized expedition a sportsman could, have any amount of fun in the Gobi, though I doubt if even the good sport would repay him the expense and discomfort.

On the morning of the 21st, patches of bright golden sand broke the green horizon, and on the evening of the same day we passed our first night *en plein desert*. The next morning showed us nothing but sand, drift upon drift, as far as the eye could see, in an unbroken horizon, save where to the north-west, in the middle distance, a ridge of abrupt, precipitous rocks glowed pink in the rays of the rising sun. By midday we encamped at their base after a hard morning's work, for the sand was axle-deep, and the camels, at times, were unable to move the carts alone. We did but little more than a mile an hour all day. Although the ridge of rocks was little over two hundred feet high, the ascent and descent occupied nearly four hours. There was no path or track of any kind, and the ridge as rough and uneven as a heap of stones. Every moment I thought the carts would go to pieces. As for the ponies, taking off their bridles and saddles, we left them to their own devices. Chow was rather

awkward, and got two or three nasty falls, but Karra scrambled about like a wild cat, and was not in the least put out. Five o'clock saw us encamped on the deep sandy plain the other side, where there should have been a well, but it was, alas! quite dry, and we had to put ourselves and the ponies on short allowance. All were thoroughly done up, when at eight o'clock p.m., the inexorable Moses made a fresh start. We then found that one of the camels was dead lame. The usual Mongol remedy of patching up the sole with small tin tacks and a piece of leather, much as a boot is cobbled, was found ineffectual, so his pack was removed, and he was untied and left to get on with the caravan as best he could. The poor brute's struggles to keep up with us were painful to witness, for a camel will go on till he drops and dies, sooner than be left alone in the desert. I would have put a bullet through him, but that the Mongols are intensely superstitious, and have a belief that killing one of these animals brings bad luck on a caravan. The poor brute was still with us when we encamped, but died about half an hour after we started in the morning. Looking back a few moments after, I saw his carcase black with crows

and carrion, though a moment before there was not a bird to be seen in the sky.

The Mongolian camel is peculiar to the country. It is two humped and very much smaller than camels found in other parts of the world. The average load of a caravan camel is 4 cwt., or four chests of tea of 1 cwt. each. It was often a source of wonder to me how these animals can exist as they do without water—indeed, they were supposed never to want it, and it was given them only when very plentiful. They ate the whole day, however, while on the plains, and the amount of food they got through *en route* was surprising. Curiously enough they seemed to prefer dry scrub to good sweet grass. In winter a long, shaggy coat protects the Mongolian camel from the keen, icy blasts that sweep over the Gobi, but in summer this is shed, with the exception of a few coarse tufts on the head, neck, and legs. Our camels appeared to suffer terribly from the heat, and perspired profusely on hot days. On these occasions we found it impossible to remain in the carts. Indeed, at all times the stench was so bad that we had to lie with our heads at an angle that no amount of pillows would rectify. Any one with apoplectic tendencies would stand a



MY CAMEL CART.

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poor chance crossing Gobi. The Mongolian camel is led in the ordinary way, i.e. by a thin plug of wood sharp at one end, and thrust through the nostril, and fastened to a string, which in turn is fastened to the camel or cart in front. The operation of drilling the hole through a young camel's nose is painful in the extreme. I witnessed it once, and not being aware that nature has provided these beasts with a kind of reservoir of green, mucous substance, presumably for purposes of self-defence, stood close to it during the operation, and received a quantity of the stuff full in my face, much to Sylvia's delight, who ducked just in time to avoid it. Beyond this, save on one occasion, I never saw a Mongolian camel show signs of temper. They are gentle, stupid creatures for the most part.

We suffered a good deal from heat and thirst our second day in the sandy desert. The work too was harder—so hard that at times we had to hitch an extra camel on to each cart, and even then could hardly get them through the deep, clinging sand. About 11 a.m., we overtook five Mongols, wild rugged-looking fellows, on their way to Ourga. Moses discovered, after a few minutes' conversation, that it was thanks to them and their ponies that the well of

yesterday was dry. They had a sheep-skin half full of water with them, but resolutely refused to spare us a drop. I do not think I ever realized what the word thirst really meant till that moment, for it was now a case of share and share alike, our supply of claret and soda-water having become exhausted three days before this. Each of these men had a bundle of heavy wooden rods fastened to his saddle-bow, and trailing on the ground, thus scoring a deep trail or wake in the sand behind him. It is only by these means that in this part of the desert the Mongol is able to find his way from yourt to yourt, for there are no landmarks to steer by. They had no tent or travelling conveniences whatever, save a large brass pan for cooking purposes, and a supply of argol in a canvas sack, though what they could find to cook was a mystery to me. They accompanied us for a time, but, seeing that we had no bottles or anything else to give them, soon left us and struck off in a south-westerly direction, directly contrary to the place they told us they were bound for, Ourga. I did not inquire why, knowing that the ways of the Mongol are inscrutable, and not to be judged as are those of the ordinary run of mankind!

So the day wore heavily away, and we plodded on, nearly up to our knees in sand by the side of the caravan till four o'clock, when Sylvia sighted a large herd of goorooshin the distance, but the glimpse we caught of them was only momentary, and the hurrying, indistinct brown mass had in a very few seconds disappeared below the horizon.

About half an hour later a loud scream attracted my attention, and, turning, I found Jee Boo flat on the ground in a dead faint, the effect, as I rightly guessed, of the sun. Moses even then was very loth to stop, and it was only by a judicious exposure of my revolver, of which Mongols have a wholesome dread, that I succeeded in halting the caravan. Pitching the tent, I soon had the wretched Chinaman inside, and made as comfortable as circumstances would permit. I found him quite unconscious, while the eyelid when opened disclosed a broad expanse of white, which was far from reassuring. Apart from the mere fact of losing the poor fellow, I could not help wondering what would become of us, in the event of his death, for we knew but half a dozen words of Mongol, and without an interpreter were helpless as the babes in the wood! The atmosphere

of the tent soon became so stifling that I had to leave it for a few minutes, feeling quite sick and faint. We all know the value of water in such cases, but of this we could ill spare a drop, having but about half a gallon left. The next well, it was true, was but seven miles distant, but who could tell that it, like its predecessor, might not be dry and empty? Altogether the situation was about as awkward as it could well be, and I cursed (not for the first time) the unlucky fate that had ever brought me to the desert of Gobi! But something had to be done and quickly, so for the first time I opened our small medicine-chest, the furnishing of which I had carelessly taken but little trouble about. Of course, as usual, everything not required was handy. Rolls of diachylon plaster, Cockle's pills, chlorodyne, menthol, Dover's and seidlitz powders, came tumbling out in glorious confusion; but we fumbled about in despair for a remedy, while Jee Boo's heavy, stertorous breathing warned us that not a moment was to be lost. I was determined that if he did die, I should not be the only one responsible for his demise, and insisted upon Lancaster's giving his opinion as to treatment! If poor Jee Boo had known the state of doubt his medical advisers were

in, I think he would have suffered even more than he did! But the course of treatment was at last decided upon, though we differed materially for some time, Lancaster insisting upon it that we should open a vein. As (when I pressed him) he seemed uncertain what vein, I felt in the interest of Jee Boo's possible widow and orphans that this was unjust. Even my small experience in surgery told me that there are some veins the opening of which will kill the strongest man in under five minutes. So this course was (by Lancaster) reluctantly abandoned, and a huge dose of sal volatile and water administered. I shall never forget that moment or my state of mind during the working of the medicine. However (and no one was more surprised than myself) it had the desired effect, and at the end of about ten minutes we had the satisfaction of seeing our patient slowly open his eyes. In half an hour he was quite conscious again. I can scarcely recommend this treatment to my readers as an infallible one for sunstroke. Indeed, I have since been told by a physician, that had not my patient been a Chinaman, it would have killed him right off!

We were not sorry to get out of the tent, for the

temperature therein registered over 100°. As the flimsy structure was only intended to hold three at the most, and as every one assisted at our medical consultation, this was hardly surprising. When we emerged again into the open air the changed appearance of the sky and desert somewhat puzzled, not to say alarmed, us. The heat was still oppressive, but whereas half an hour previously the sky had been bright and cloudless, it was now darkened, while the sun like a huge ball of fire glowed, red and angry, in the misty heavens, which had changed within the last ten or fifteen minutes from a deep intense blue to a uniform leaden colour. Nor was the appearance of the desert the same, the glassy yellow expanse of sand had disappeared. Beyond a distance of thirty or forty yards one saw nothing but a moving yellow mass swaying to and fro, and producing the effect, against the dark masses of cloud, of a huge field of ripe corn waving wildly about in a heavy gale of wind.

The *coup-d'œil* would have been peculiar and interesting anywhere else. In the desert it was weird and alarming, so much so that I returned to the tent, and, calling Moses out, drew his attention to it,

and not a moment too soon. In less time than it takes to write, Sylvia was scouring the plain in search of the camels, which had fortunately not strayed far out of reach, while Aaron busied himself in firmly hammering in the tent-pegs, which had only been lightly fixed during our temporary halt. In less than ten minutes the camels were in and tethered in a line next the carts, to which the ponies were firmly fastened. Moses then led or rather pushed us into our carts, and slammed the door in our faces. Looking out of the window a moment after I saw the Mongols disappear one by one into the tent; Sylvia, who entered last, firmly fastening the aperture behind him. During these mysterious preparations it had become darker and darker, while the wind, which had suddenly risen, was driving thick woolly masses of white cloud across the black lowering sky. We were not long in suspense. A few seconds only elapsed when a perfect tornado burst upon us. I managed with some difficulty to open my door on the lee side and look out, but could see nothing but one whirling mass of sand or vapour, I could not tell which, in appearance very much like a thick London fog. Nor could we hear anything but the whirling of the

wind, the wild, unearthly cries of the camels, whose shadowy forms I could just distinguish huddled together a few yards from me, and the neighing of Chow and Karra, the latter of whom had, with his usual sagacity and fore-thought, broken his bridle and crawled under my cart. Then for the first time the truth dawned upon me—we were in a sand-storm.

It was not an agreeable sensation, for I was in a pleasing state of uncertainty as to how it would all end. One might as well have tried, during the storm, to attract the attention of the man in the moon as to make oneself heard. Luckily it did not last long. In five minutes it was over, and the sky blue and clear again. The sight on looking out of the carts again was a queer one. The camels' heads were invisible, each being burrowed under the body of his neighbour. As for the tent, it had disappeared, and it was only after a time that I made out a heap of sand with a moving mass underneath to show where it had been. It had blown down early in the proceedings, and Moses and Co., to say nothing of the wretched Jee Boo, narrowly escaped suffocation. In half an hour everything had resumed its wonted appearance, and the air was as cool and

pleasant as before it had been sultry and oppressive. The inside of our carts, though, were an inch deep in sand, and our nostrils, hair and eyes full of it. Save for a hot, feverish feeling that banished sleep, and gave one an uncomfortable feeling in the head like influenza, we felt no ill effects, and were not altogether sorry when it was over that we had experienced the strange phenomenon. Sand-storms are rare in Gobi, but when they do occur are dangerous to solitary travellers. Many mysterious disappearances in this part of the desert are put down to them; for the sand-drifts obliterating the marks of the Mongol's guiding rods, he is unable to retrace his steps to the yourt he started from.

We reached the wells at about 4 a.m. next morning, and were relieved to find them nearly full, and the water drinkable. The rain came down in torrents shortly afterwards. We would have given a good deal for a shower the day before, but could now have gladly dispensed with it, for the carts leaked badly, and we were wet through before the weather cleared at daybreak. We got a couple of hours' rest though, and by ten o'clock were away again, refreshed if not rested. It is astonishing

what little amount of sleep a man can do with when put to it.

The morning of this (the 23rd of August) was bright and clear, and the rain and cool air seemed to have given a new lease of life to man and beast. Jee Boo, though complaining of slight headache, had otherwise quite recovered from his attack, so that with the bright sunshine and crisp, clear air, our spirits rose, and all went merry as the traditional marriage-bell. Towards midday we had a somewhat exciting chase after an antelope, and one that might have resulted somewhat disagreeably. The ever-watchful Jee Boo having sighted a herd near a ridge of rocks some three miles distant, we saddled the ponies, and, with our rifles, galloped towards them under the guidance of the little Tartar, taking care to keep the ridge between us. When within about three hundred yards of the spot, we dismounted, Lancaster, accompanied by Sylvia, making for the right of the rocks (which were about a mile in length and two hundred feet in height) while I took the left hand. Though less precipitous than the ridge we had crossed two days before, the ascent was too steep to be pleasant, especially when laden with a rifle in one hand, and

having to lead a wilful and obstinate pony with the other.

We reached the summit in safety after a stiff climb. To any pony but Karra the ascent would have been impossible. Securing his bridle to a sharp edge of rock, I lay flat upon the ground, and crawled to the edge of the precipice, but there was nothing to be seen but bare sandy plain. Having watched for about five minutes, I was about to rise and take up a fresh position, when the crack of Lancaster's rifle rang out some distance to the right. In another moment the whole herd, some sixty or seventy in number, came bounding by just underneath me. Picking out a fine buck, I took steady aim, fired, and had the satisfaction of seeing him drop on his forelegs. I thought for a second he was badly hit, but he only reeled to and fro once or twice, then with an effort regained his feet, and galloped on after the others, who were already almost out of sight. Seeing that he got over the ground but slowly and with difficulty, I determined to give chase, and, loosing Karra, we made our way helter-skelter down the cliff-side. Though the climb had taken us quite half an hour, the descent did not take more than three minutes. Some of the

ledges were quite four feet high, with a landing on smooth slippery rock, but little Karra never once made a mistake. Arrived at the bottom of the cliff, I jumped on his back, and away we went full gallop after the wounded antelope, now just disappearing out of sight over a high ridge of sand a good distance off. My pony was even keener than I, and I never knew till that day what a little wonder he was. Fifteen days had we been in the desert, travelling day and night, and two days of that on short allowance of water and food, and yet here he was galloping as strong as a steam engine, and pulling and tearing at his bridle as if he had been in the stable for a month. What would he not have been worth in England! But quickly as we covered the distance to the ridge which had hidden the antelope from view, we were too late. No trace could we discover of him. The desert was here covered with innumerable sandhills and depressions, and it is more than likely that he succeeded in hiding himself in one of these. We hunted about for some time, but without success. I dared not stop too long, for fear of losing the caravan, which I knew had not stopped during our absence. So, somewhat disappointed, I dismounted, and led

Karra slowly back to the rocks where, as I thought, Lancaster and Sylvia were awaiting me. No trace of the caravan was now visible.

I took my time returning to the ridge, imagining that by this time my companions had seen me, and would not move till I came up to them. It seemed strange too that they should have abandoned their position, for on coming up to the right side of the rocks I found them gone. When, on riding the whole length of the ridge, shouting as I went, I saw no signs of them, the disagreeable truth flashed across me that they had departed altogether—a surmise which proved correct. In vain I searched every cleft and ravine, thinking they might have penetrated thither in search of wounded game; in vain I yelled myself hoarse, and blew the whistle which we always carried in view of this contingency, till I was black in the face; not a sound came in answer, but the echoes, which the innumerable creeks and gullies which riddled the place flung back to me. In one of the ravines, curiously enough, I came upon a tree, the first and only one we saw in the desert, or indeed since leaving Tsin W'hui Poo; it was but ten or twelve feet high, a kind of wild olive with gnarled trunk and scanty

foliage. At any other time I should have stopped to examine it more closely, but that my mind was then running on matters very far removed from natural history. Every moment the awkwardness of my position grew more apparent. A thousand doubts and fears crowded on my mind, which the surroundings of the lone, desolate-looking place did not tend to reassure. At one moment I was for remaining where I was, but the next brought the reflection that Lancaster, having seen me riding for dear life in a S.W. direction, would probably direct the Mongols in that quarter, and never dream of returning to this bleak barren rock. One thing was certain, if the caravan did not rescue me, no one would, for this part of Gobi is as uninhabited and desolate as the interior of the Sahara itself.

Of a sudden the thought struck me to climb to the summit of the rocks, and as a last resource to scan the horizon from that altitude with the glasses I had fortunately brought with me. Securing Karra to the old tree, I again ascended to the top, this time not without some hard knocks and scratches, while the perspiration poured off me in my anxiety to lose no time. I was never without a compass in the desert, and had luckily taken the

bearings of the rocks before we set out that morning. Allowing for time and distance, I found the caravan should now be N.N.W. from where I stood, and turning my glasses to the spot, discovered it to my great relief, on the very edge of the horizon, and hardly visible, even through the powerful glasses. To the naked eye it was invisible. First taking care to get my bearings right, I scrambled down, and, loosing Karra, galloped after it *ventre à terre*. In twenty minutes it was well in sight, and we were safe.

It was all owing to Sylvia, who had persuaded Lancaster to return, saying that I should without doubt join the caravan farther on. A Mongol failing is to think that strangers know their way about the desert as well as they do themselves. Lancaster had had no better luck than myself, so our day's sport was hardly a success. We were a good deal disappointed, though not so much as our men, who had been looking forward to a meal of fresh roast meat, the gooroosh being excellent eating.

Towards evening of the same day we traversed a tract of sand about a mile across, so deep that we had to hitch three camels on to each cart.

assured us were robbers, who would have attacked us had they not found us too strong for them, and on the defensive.

We passed a couple of yourts shortly afterwards, smoke-blackened, shapeless dwellings, about half the size of an ordinary Mongol tent, with a small hole for a door, out of which a man and a woman crawled and offered us argol for sale. More revolting specimens of the human race I have never seen. We saw no sheep or ponies about; indeed there was nothing to feed them upon. Hard by lay a dead camel, the stench from which nearly knocked us down fifty yards off, and on which the poor wretches had been subsisting for several days. Other food they had none, though there was a well brimful of clear cold water a quarter of a mile farther on, at which we filled the barrels, and, for the first time for ten days, washed our hands and faces.

We managed to get some sleep in the carts, for the first and only time that night, for the ground was as smooth as a billiard-table, and there were no stones or boulders to disturb our slumbers. Nor did I wake till past one o'clock, when the caravan halted.

Looking out of the cart window, I at first imagined

t we had arrived at Ourga, for we were encamped, apparently, under the walls of a city. At the same time it struck me as strange, that a silence so dead should reign over such a large place. The illusion was complete, and I was never more astonished to find that what I had taken for walls, towers and roofs of houses, were in reality nothing more than a group of enormous blocks of granite. Some must have measured quite fifty feet high by twenty broad, the space of ground they occupied being considerably over a square mile. Had I thought for a moment, I must have known that stone buildings in Mongolia are extremely rare, almost unknown. A Mongol Tartar has the greatest objection to living in a permanent dwelling of any sort or kind, and even Ourga, the capital, is composed almost exclusively of tents. Notwithstanding, one could scarcely realize that it was an optical delusion, that the mimic domes and minarets standing out clear and distinct, as a pen-and-ink sketch against the starlit sky, were but masses of unhewn stone, and the work of nature, not of man.

Our Mongols were asleep, and Lancaster; but late as it was, and at the sacrifice of my remaining

rest, I could not resist the temptation of exploring the place, first taking the precaution of arming myself. It looked just the kind of spot that robbers or marauders, had there been any about, would have selected for an encampment.

I found the interior as curious as the outside, for the rocks were placed as regularly, and the ways as well defined, as the streets and squares of a modern city. The deathlike stillness, and queer fantastic shadows, thrown by the bright moon-rays, gave one an uncanny feeling, and I took care to keep the caravan fires in sight. Although outside the desert was hard and gravelly, the sand here was knee-deep. Suddenly while walking down one of the smaller paths my foot struck sharply against a small square stone sunk deeply into the sand. On examining this more closely, I found that on it was rudely carved a Russian character and a cross. It was evidently a grave. Having no desire to prolong my investigations after this, I was about to rise and return to the caravan, when an indefinable impression stole over me that something, and something human and living, was near me. The feeling may have been produced by liver, perhaps by instinct. At any rate, it was

orrect, for on turning I found myself next to one of the most repulsive and hideous creatures I have ever beheld. It was impossible to tell in the dim light whether it was a man or a woman, for its body was covered with shapeless rags, its head with a mass of grey tangled hair that hid the features. I have seldom felt more uncomfortable, and would at that moment gladly have given five pounds to be back safe and snug in my cart. At any rate, I thought, the sooner out of this the better, so seizing my opportunity, I dodged past the figure, and walked quickly away in the direction of the camp fires. Guessing my intention, it pursued me for a few yards, struggling with difficulty through the deep sand, but I soon distanced it, and only breathed freely again when I had got out of the place, and was once more in the open.

The caravan was in a state of commotion when I returned, for I had been away quite an hour, and having told no one of my intention, they were, on waking, at a loss to know where I had got to. When I related my adventures to Moses, his face was a picture. "Moo chim" (bad men), he kept repeating, which meant that the place, according

to Mongols, is haunted, and that no one who can avoid it ever penetrates into its silent, mysterious depths by day or night. Whether the creature I saw was a ghost, I know not. If so, it was a very dirty one. It would have needed the pencil of a Doré, the pen of a Rider Haggard, to describe the place, which was certainly the most marvellous freak of nature I have ever come across.

I made inquiries at Kiakhta, but could never find out anything to explain, geologically, the presence of these stones, and their peculiar position. All the Russian merchants could tell me was that a Cossack in charge of the mail had been buried there seven years ago, and that the place ever since was said by the Mongols to be infested with evil spirits. It seems strange that no efforts have ever been made by the professors belonging to the College of Kiakhta to unravel the mystery, but the latter appeared to give more of their leisure hours to cards, vodka, and flirtation with their neighbours' wives than to scientific research.

The morning of the next day (July 25th) was cold and cloudy. We crossed, an hour after starting, a large salt-marsh, with tufts of half-withered grass growing here and there. The ponies fared

badly, but the camels managed all right, as I verily believe they would do in a crater. Though this marsh is deep in rainy weather, and very difficult to get over, there had, luckily, been no rain for some time, and we crossed it without difficulty, the ground being hard, and covered with evaporated salt, giving the desert the appearance of a huge snow-field. Beyond this, vegetation again ceased, and we entered on a tract of gravelly country. Some low green hills now appeared on the horizon—the plains and rich pastures of Too-goo-rook, at which yourt the hardest part of our desert journey would be virtually over.

We encamped midday at the foot of a steep and barren rock, about one thousand feet high, on the banks of a large lake of dirty, brackish water, as wild and desolate a spot as can well be imagined. Huge vultures and other carrion birds flew hither and thither about the rocks and ravines, while the dismal and incessant croaking of the frogs among the withered sedges that fringed the black, melancholy-looking water made the place anything but a cheerful spot for an encampment. The further end of the lake swarmed with wild fowl, and we

succeeded, after dinner, in bagging a couple of sheldrake, though they were so shy, it was only with great difficulty we could get near them. We also shot an enormous vulture, seven feet broad from one wing-tip to the other; but he smelt so, we had to have him carried some distance away from the caravan. This was explained by the partially devoured remains of a camel we afterwards passed a few hundred yards from camp. The brink of the lake was strewn with the bleached bones of these animals, which did not contribute to make the *coup-d'œil* more cheerful.

Towards evening we sighted a large herd of antelope on the horizon, but they saw us, and were off long before we could give chase.

About five o'clock it came on to rain and blow as it only can in Gobi. I do not think I ever spent a more wretched night. The storm became so bad that the camels would not face it, and we had to stop and pitch tents at ten o'clock, three hours before the usual time. Several attempts were made to light a fire, but without success, for the wind not only blew it out, but the wretched, flimsy tent down on top of it, Mongols and all. We consoled ourselves as best

we could with a nip of whisky (of which we had one bottle left), and turned into our carts to make the best of it. But even our sheepskins were next to useless in the keen wind that whistled through the rents and chinks of the canvas cart roofs as if they had been sieves. About midnight the rain came down again in sheets, and in less than half an hour was streaming in upon us, like a shower-bath. We were wet through in less than ten minutes, and then abandoned the idea of rest or sleep altogether.

If the night had been miserable, the morning was far worse. We were perfectly willing to start; anything was preferable to sitting in our carts, listening to the ceaseless pattering of the rain and looking out of the narrow window at the misty, dreary landscape; but the Mongols were obdurate. Nothing upsets them like rain or getting wet, presumably because they never wash, and Moses steadfastly refused to move till the weather cleared, which it showed no signs whatever of doing. Our men had managed to rig the tent up again, and all three lay inside, packed like sardines, with every aperture tightly closed. I tried to read, but soon had to give it up, my head shook so with

the cold. Worse still, we had exhausted our last scrap of tobacco, and could not bring ourselves to venture on the hay-like filth that Sylvia offered us. Still, it showed the little Tartar's unselfishness, for he had but a pipeful left to last him on to Ourga, and there is no race in the world so devoted to the fragrant weed.

About two o'clock it mended a little, and the sun, which had all the morning been invisible, began to struggle through the grey, watery clouds. So sudden are the changes of temperature and weather in the desert that by 3 p.m. the sky was blue and cloudless, and the sun too hot to be pleasant. We were not sorry to get out again, and dry ourselves in the warm rays which took the stiffness out of our cramped and aching limbs. We suffered but little from vermin, which up till now had been one of our greatest annoyances, after this. "It's an ill wind that blows nobody good;" and perhaps they were all drowned!

Starting at 7 p.m., we travelled all night, and by morning every trace of sand and gravel had disappeared, and we were in the grass plains again—where our ponies fairly revelled in the fresh, rich pasture. Sylvia was despatched to a yourt some

five miles distant to buy a camel in place of the one we had lost, and as he was not expected back till six o'clock, we enjoyed a good sleep all the afternoon, not before we wanted it. We had had none for two nights.

The camel arrived in due course. He was a snow-white one, of mild and benign appearance. Lancaster took a great fancy to him, and insisted in having him harnessed to his cart. I noticed a look in the beast's eye, whenever he was pushed about or touched more roughly than usual, that boded no good. However, we were assured that he was all that could be desired, and took Sylvia's word for it. We started again that evening, with our new purchase in Lancaster's cart. Although the night was fine and starlit, with a lovely moon, I turned into my cart early, for the plain was as smooth and unbroken as a lawn-tennis ground, and I did not despair of getting a really good night's rest, and probably should have had one, but for an unforeseen accident that, ridiculous and laughable as it now seems, might have had a very serious, if not fatal result. I was rudely awoke about 2 a.m. by Jee Boo, who bursting open my door, entreated me to come out at once. One is easily unnerved in the

desert, and apt to fancy things, so much so that for a moment I thought a mutiny had broken out among the Mongols, and, seizing my revolver and pouch, jumped out on to the moonlit plain. The sight that greeted my eyes caused me at first to burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter, in which, however, the Mongols, who were helplessly assembled round my cart, did not join. Like them, I also soon realized how seriously the affair might end. Lancaster's camel had *run away*, and was scouring the plain in a way that plainly showed if we ever intended seeing him again we had better catch him at once. The ponies were all unsaddled, but Sylvia and I jumped upon ours barebacked, and galloped away as hard as we could lay legs to the ground after the refractory beast, whose white body, followed by the cart swaying madly to and fro, was rapidly disappearing in the dim, shadowy distance. It had happened in a second. Sylvia, having left his cart for a moment, which was leading, the cunning brute had taken advantage of his absence to break with one jerk the string that fastened his cart to the next camel. When our driver returned, he found the caravan halted and his new purchase making tracks across the plain in,

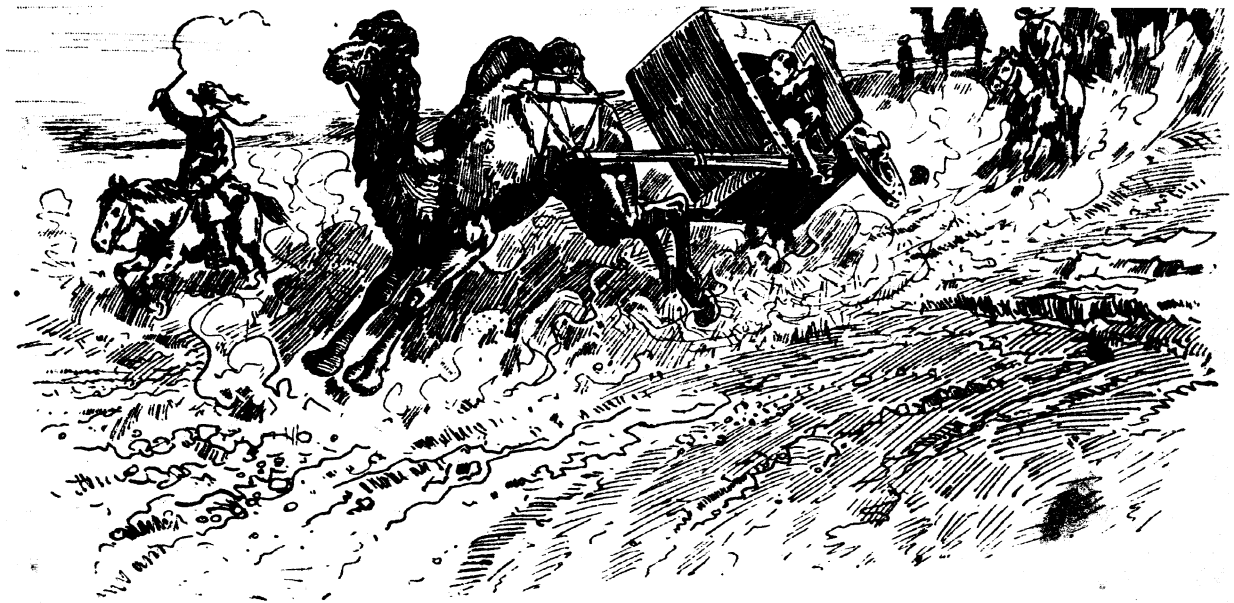
strange to say, the direction of the yourt we had bought him from.

The best description I have ever read of a camel's pace when at full speed is given by the late Colonel Burnaby, in "A Ride to Khiva," where he says: "A camel's gait is a peculiar one. They go something like a pig with the fore, and like a cow with the hind, legs." This does not sound like speed, but the pace at which these brutes get over the ground is something more than remarkable, and it took us all our time, to get up to Lancaster's cart, who was, to use a sporting expression, "going strong!" The frantic bounds the cart was taking beggars description. I thought every second it would overturn, for the brute whirled it about as if it had been a match-box. I could see Lancaster in the moonlight at the open door, evidently meditating a jump, so shouted to him to remain where he was. The ground was rough and stony, and to fall might have meant a broken limb, which would have placed us in an awkward predicament. It was some time before we managed to stop the runaway by each getting one side of, and riding into, him. I never could have believed a camel had such a turn of speed. Sylvia caught the nose

string, and we secured him at last, and got him back to the caravan without further mishap. He was relegated to the water-barrels in future. It was thought the weight might steady him, and it did, for we were troubled with no more of his pranks.

The plains next day were more thickly inhabited and the pasture more luxuriant than in any part of the desert yet traversed. We passed several yourts, from which the inhabitants rode out to meet us with presents of milk and a kind of cheese made of mare's milk. They seemed cleaner and better-mannered than the Mongols the other side, and did not (for a wonder) ask us for anything. Their yourts, too, were cleaner, their sheep and ponies better looking than others we had seen.

This portion of the Gobi swarms with a curious animal, of which I ignore the name. It is in colour like a hare, in size something between that animal and a rabbit, with short thin legs, and stiff wiry hair like that of a badger. The ground was in many places literally honeycombed with their burrows, which are enormous for so small an animal. Many of the holes would for a short distance admit a good-sized man. They are neatly and beautifully



AN AWKWARD MOMENT.

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constructed, the earth being carried and thrown away some distance off, though *how* has not been ascertained. We must have seen thousands, but could never get near enough to shoot one, and so examine it closely. Unlike the smaller species of rat on the other side, they are, shy and wary, and bolt into their holes on the slightest noise. It is said that Mongols eat them, but I am rather doubtful as to the truth of this assertion. Few would have the patience or take the trouble to catch them.

We sighted, on the 28th of August, a huge encampment of some fifty tents, on the horizon, evidently the yourt of some chief or Lama of importance, *en voyage.* On passing it at the nearest point (some two miles distant), Lancaster and I were riding off to inspect it more closely, but were recalled by the frantic gesticulations of Moses, who begged us on no account to go. His reason I never could ascertain, but he led us to understand, through Jee Boo, that we might meet with an unpleasant reception, by which I conclude some religious ceremony was being performed. We could distinguish through the glasses, crowds of people moving about the encampment, on

foot and on horseback, and these with the white tents gay with gaudy prayer-flags, against the bright green sward, gave it more the appearance of a huge fair than a desert camp. The plains for miles around were dotted with flocks and herds, but none of the people, though they saw us distinctly, rode out to the caravan.

The country on the 28th became more accentuated and undulating. We passed to-day two large lakes (fresh) teeming with wild fowl, duck, and wild geese, of which latter we bagged a brace, and ate for dinner, washed down by a bottle of champagne specially kept for the day when the neck of our desert journey should be broken. The plain to-day was full of huge edible mushrooms as large as soup plates. We gathered a quantity, and had some for dinner, although as we ate them solely on Jee Boo's assurance that they were not poisonous, we were somewhat uneasy for a couple of hours after. We encamped to-day in a kind of oasis, of wild, sweet-smelling flowers, pink heather and long grass through which ran a delightfully clear cold stream of water over a gravelly bed. It was like nectar, after the filth we had been drinking, and yet so improvident are the Mongols,

that had we not insisted upon it, they would have left without filling the barrels. It was lucky we did so, for the two succeeding wells were stagnant and brackish, and one, having the remains of a dead sheep in it, undrinkable. The next day at mid-day we camped in sight of the high and partly wooded hills that surround Ourga.

A Lama, *en route* to the capital, now joined us. This is an invariable custom in the desert, a Tartar never travelling alone if he can possibly help it, perhaps more for the sake of companionship than from fear of robbers or marauders, who are said to infest the more lonely parts of Gobi. He (the Lama) was a fat, good-tempered old fellow, his enormously fat carcase clad from head to foot in bright yellow silk. The grey pony he rode was so tiny that looked at from behind its body was invisible. One saw nothing but a huge balloon-like mass of yellow silk, supported by four thin, very shaky-looking white legs. I noticed, throughout Mongolia, that the fattest men invariably rode the smallest ponies, perhaps on the same principle that in Europe the largest instrument in a German band is almost invariably played by a diminutive child of tender years.

We visited a yourt after dinner by the invitation of our newly made fat friend. The tent was cleaner, both inside and out, than the ones we had passed here on the Chinese side, indeed all the yourts had a prosperous, well-to-do look about them, very different to the smoke-blackened, dirty-looking dwellings on the southern side of the sandy desert. This was probably due to their being in the close vicinity of the capital, and also in a great measure to the fuel used being wood instead of the sickly-smelling, stifling "Argol."

The reader may or may not believe in Palmistry, but it can scarcely fail to interest him to hear that this ancient science is as well known among the Mongols as the gipsies, and has been for hundreds of years. I found this out quite by accident, on examining the hand of a young girl who brought us milk and cheese, and otherwise did the honours of the yourt. To my surprise she at once guessed my intention, and insisted on my reading it all through, and explaining the lines to her. Nor did my work end here, a dozen greasy palms being eagerly thrust forward as soon as I had completed "Tsaira's."

The latter, a bright-looking girl of about sixteen,

was evidently the belle of these parts, and not unjustly so, for her dark eyes, comely features, and pearly teeth were a pleasing contrast to the ordinary stolid, flat-faced females of the desert. She was the first (and last) really pretty Mongolian woman we saw, and unlike most of her sex (in the desert) not the least shy. The operation of shaving (which I now went through preparatory to meeting the Russian Consul at Ourga) astonished her a good deal, but the sight of a looking-glass much more so. She had never heard of such a thing, or seen her own pretty face, except dimly reflected in water or tea. It was the only one we possessed, or I could not have had the heart to refuse it her, for she was not backward in asking. However, a few sticks of chocolate consoled her, though she tried very hard for a ring I wore. It was only by impressing on her that it was given me by a "Boosooge"[1] almost as pretty as herself, who would never forgive me, if I returned without it, that she allowed me to depart in peace, which we did at sunset, all the inhabitants of the court turning out to bid us good-bye, and load us with parting gifts of milk and cheese.

The next day (30th August) we entered a green

[1] Woman.

and fertile valley, about three miles broad, with lofty, partially wooded hills on either side. The plain was in parts thickly inhabited, and we continually passed Mongols, both men and women, and during the day three large caravans, two of bullock-carts one hundred to one hundred and fifty strong, laden with wood and hides for China, to return with tea. The third was composed exclusively of camels, sixty in number. About twenty men accompanied it. On one of the leading camels was a poor Mongol, evidently in a dying condition. Our own men were far behind, and the ones we questioned by signs, only laughed and walked on when we pointed to the poor wretch, lying on his back with the fierce sun beating down on his ghastly, upturned face. About a quarter of a mile behind the caravan came the Chinaman in charge, gorgeous in yellow and lavender silk, and bristling with arms. I felt very much inclined to kick him out of his cart, and put the dying Mongol there instead. Although white men of any kind are so rare here, they never deigned to look at us, nor reply to our question, addressed in Chinese, as to how many days they had left Ourga. By getting them into conversation, we might, we thought, have accompanied

them as far as the caravan, and by Jee Boo's help got something done for the poor Tartar, but it was no use. I could not get the latter out of my head the whole day, and shuddered when I thought of how his sufferings might end. The Mongols never bury their dead, at any time, and often on a voyage leave their sick to themselves, very much as they do a camel, alone in mid-desert.

The queer custom prevalent among the Mongol Tartars of leaving their dead on the surface of the ground was brought to my notice in a forcible though somewhat unpleasant manner the next day, a couple of hours before we reached the river Tola, which lies about two miles from Ourga. Upon this occasion our baggage-camels had, contrary to custom, started first. The caravan road here is clearly defined, so we started off alone and on foot in advance of our party, and had barely gone three hundred yards when an object lying in the middle of the road arrested my attention, a small, oblong parcel about two feet long, done up in Chinese paper, and secured with twine. "Something Moses has dropped," I remarked casually; and the contents feeling soft and shapeless, I put it down to some of his wearing apparel, and returned to the

caravan to give it to Sylvia, who had just started and was, as usual, softly crooning to himself in a semi-state of slumber on the leading camel. But catching sight of what I held, he nearly fell off with fright, and shrieking "Moo-moo" with all his might, pulled his camel away from me with such force that the cart nearly turned over. "Moo-moo," he repeated, hurriedly dismounting, and leaving the caravan to itself, put a respectful distance between us. His face was a picture of alarm and dismay, and as pale as a ghost. I was not altogether easy myself, thinking the packet might be infected with some virulent disease, so I yielded to the little Tartar's vehement gestures, threw it on the ground and walked on, followed slowly by Sylvia muttering to himself and smoking furiously, a sure sign that a Mongol's equanimity has been seriously upset.

It was not till we reached the others at mid-day that I found out what the mysterious packet contained, and that what I had innocently been carrying about was a *dead baby!* Sylvia had by this time recovered himself, and affected to laugh at the occurrence, though, at the time, I have never seen a human being in a state of more abject terror.

The Russian Consul, when I told him of the occurrence, remarked that all Mongols have an almost ridiculous fear of death and everything connected with it. This seemed the more curious as every step you take in their capital reminds you of it. Ourga might justly be called "a dead city," so grim and weird are the customs of its strange, uncanny population.

We sighted the Tola at about nine o'clock on the morning of the 31st of August, and must have passed at least a dozen caravans of fifty or sixty camels each, before we reached its banks, from the time we started, about six a.m. The reports we got as to the state of the river were not encouraging. Heavy rains had made the ford impassable, and all traffic was now being carried on by means of the ferry, some five miles lower down the stream. It was not reassuring either to hear that this ramshackle contrivance had broken down twice within the last twenty-four hours, precipitating three bullock-carts and two men (one of whom was drowned) into the water. However, we made up our minds for the worst, and, hoping for the best, gave ourselves up to enjoyment of the really beautiful scenery we were passing through.

One might have been in the most picturesque parts of Switzerland or the Tyrol. A broad, gravelly road runs from here right into Ourga, and along this a continual stream of caravans, inward and outward bound, was hurrying. The whole plain was alive with movement, and the bright sunshine, gay dresses of Mongol horsemen, and tinkling of caravan bells, gave an air of gaiety to the scene, welcome enough after twenty-three days of uninterrupted, monotonous desert. On our right hand a clear, brawling stream swirled along, an outlet of the swollen, tumultuous Tola, to lose itself in the large freshwater lake we passed yesterday. On our left a range of low, green hills, wooded at the summit, their green hill-sides, dotted with countless sheep and ponies at pasture, stretched away to where the Tola, a thin thread of silver, wound its course through this lovely valley, literally a "land of milk and honey!" We arrived at the riverside about one o'clock. The foaming, turgid river, the banks lined on either side, as far as eye could see, with bullock-carts and camels, the row and hubbub, where each man (and there must have been some hundreds) tried to shout louder than his neighbour; it was a strange, picturesque sight.

A smart dapper-looking Cossack, in grey coat with yellow facings, and white, peakless cap, had charge of the ferry, a clumsy-looking arrangement enough, worked by a dilapidated-looking rope stretched across the stream, here about three hundred yards wide, and secured to two small trees on either side of the river. It did not need much calculation to see where the ferry would go in the event of this breaking, for about two hundred yards down stream was a chain of rocks, against which the torrent foamed and dashed in a manner anything but cheering to non-swimmers like Lancaster and myself. The result of an accident had been pretty well shown, for this was the third boat used during the last twenty-four hours, the others having been engulfed, with the loss, however, of only one human life.

The Cossack was politeness itself, and I luckily knew a little Russian. "Are you the Englishmen expected from Pekin?" "Yes." How they knew of our advent at Ourga was, and has ever since been, inexplicable to me. "M. Shishmaroff has been expecting you. Please take a seat, and I will send you and the ponies over, the carts can follow." And offering us a cigarette, our friend hurried off to

see our steeds safely embarked. Though only a private soldier, the man's manner was as courteous and polite as could be. It was, however, only a forerunner of what we were to experience, for seldom have I experienced in any country so much genuine kindness and hospitality from the lower orders as in Asiatic Russia.

Our friend the Cossack returned in under half an hour. "Your boat is ready, Gospodin, and you can get in, but please sit tight. I will cross with you. In case of accident," he added coolly, as he politely handed us in, "jump out and hold on to the rope. The Mongols will pull you ashore."

It was not a pleasant sensation, crossing that stream, in fact I do not know that I have ever passed a much more *mauvais quart-d'heure.* The clumsy craft, although containing only the Cossack, our two selves and the ponies, lurched over midway across, so suddenly and at such an angle that the water came pouring in over the side. This frightened the ponies, who set to plunging and kicking with such a will that I thought every instant their heels would go through the side of the rotten old tub. We were then, luckily, considerably more than

half-way over, each holding on like grim death to the rope, for to let go would have meant a certain upset. Never have I heard such a babel. The Mongols on the bank (in whose minds the death of their drowned companion was still fresh) raised a yell that would have awoke the dead, and must have disturbed the Kootooktas mid-day siesta three miles off. It was only by dint of sheer hard work, that we succeeded in pulling ourselves across, our fingers nearly cut to the bone by the fraying of the rope. I have seldom felt more relieved than when we stood once more high and dry on terra firma. The thought of how our carts were to be got over did not concern us in the least. We were only too glad to have escaped with our lives, for an upset, even to a good swimmer, would have meant certain death.

It was nearly three o'clock by the time we were across, and as the carts were not to be brought over till the ferry was repaired, a work of three or four hours, we resolved to ride on alone. The way was simple enough, for a broad gravel path or road runs right into the city. Having got minute directions from the Cossack how to find the Consul's house, we set off at a gallop across the plain to Ourga.

So ended our journey over the desert proper. What we had always imagined would be the hardest part of our journey was now over. We had never thought of Siberia. That seemed feasible enough. Our bugbear, before starting, had been Gobi, the terrible Chinese desert, against which we had been so often warned before leaving England. "You will never get across," said one. "The Tartars will murder you for a certainty," said another. Even in Pekin itself we heard blood-curdling stories of the wild tribes said to inhabit the lonely waste lying between the Great Wall of China and Russian frontier. As a matter of fact, few Europeans, even those living in China itself, know anything whatever of Mongolia. Danger there may be, but we never experienced it, nor do the three or four Englishmen who preceded us make mention of ever having been attacked. I would, personally, very much sooner spend the night unarmed and alone in the (so-called) most dangerous parts of Gobi, than walk through the lonelier suburbs of London or Paris, after dark on a winter's evening.

We skirted for a time the precipitous mountain that lines the left bank of the Tola. Presently we came to an abrupt turn in the road; a glorious

panorama of plain and wood, mountain and river, lay at our feet, and a couple of miles away a compact mass of red and white dwellings, golden domes, and snowy tents, surmounted and surrounded by thousands of brightly coloured-prayer flags, which flashed and waved in the sun with every breath of the pure morning air. We had reached the sacred city of Ourga.

CHAPTER VI.

OURGA TO KIAKHTA.

OURGA can scarcely be called a city in the true acceptance of the term. Its Mongol name, "Ta Huren," or "The Great Encampment," better describes the huge cluster of tents that compose the Mongolian capital, dwellings precisely similar in shape and size to those in the desert, save that here they are surrounded by rough wooden palisades, eight to ten feet in height, as a protection against the thieves and marauders who in the caravan season nightly infest the streets.

The population of Ourga, which is estimated at about 40,000, fluctuates a good deal. This is owing in a great measure to the nomad disposition of the inhabitants, who are here to-day and gone to-morrow, taking not only their goods and chattles, but also their house with them. With the exception of the

Kootookta's palace, an imposing edifice of Tibetan architecture, all white, gold and vermilion, like an ornament off the top of a twelfth-cake, there are but three brick houses in the place, residences of Russian tea-merchants, of whom, when we passed, there were seven residing in Ourga. These, with the half-dozen Europeans stationed at the Consulate, mid-way between Ourga and Maimachin, formed the entire European population of the capital of Mongolia.

Notwithstanding, Ourga is of no little importance as a trading centre, for it is the only stage in the tea-carrying trade between China and Russia, while it exports large quantities of hides, timber, and clothing throughout Mongolia. Ourga is the Mecca of the Mongol, and the distances travelled by the faithful for the privilege of gazing upon the features of their living god, the Kootookta, are sometimes incredible. Pilgrimages are made from Manchuria, nine hundred miles away, and a man arrived, while we were there, from the borders of Tibet, having accomplished the distance across the desert, a great part of it sandy waste, alone and on foot. The journey from Ourga to Lassa (Tibet) is made in great state by the Grand Lama of Mongolia on the death or

transmigration of a Kootookta, to procure another from the "Dalai Lama" of Tibet. There are but two living deities in Mongol Buddhism. The Dalai Lama of Lassa, and Kootookta of Ourga. It is for this that the Mongolian capital is looked upon as the second sacred city of the world, Lassa, the capital of Tibet, being the first.

The present Kootookta is about eighteen years of age, lives, like the Emperor of China, a life of the strictest privacy, and is only exhibited to the faithful by the Lamas or priests in charge on very rare occasions. Though worshipped as a god, he is allowed no voice in the government of the country, which is entrusted to two viceroys, a Mongol prince and a Manchu Tartar from the court of Pekin. The latter keeps an eye on the sacred youth, and sees that he does not meddle with state affairs. Presumably also (as no Kootookta has ever been known to live over the age of twenty) attends to other little matters when the proper time comes.

We had left the caravan at nine o'clock. It was past ten when, passing the Chinese town of Maimachin, the green roof and gilt balls and crosses of the Russian Consulate came in sight, a handsome stone building, in a spacious garden,

just outside the tented city. The day was bright and beautiful; as we galloped through the crisp clear air, our ponies' feet rattling along the sound and springy turf, our spirits rose at the thought that our desert journey was really over, that the neck of the voyage was (as we thought) broken. Ignorance, in this case, was indeed bliss!

At a short distance, Ourga presents the appearance of some huge fair. The white tents, blue and gold temples, and gaudy prayer-flags, gave us at first sight a pleasing impression of the place, which was, however, speedily dispelled on closer acquaintance with its dismal-looking streets, deserted save by beggars and dogs, and the hideous customs practised day and night by its strange population.

We soon reached the gates of the Russian Consulate, and I pulled the heavy, clanging courtyard bell with a sense of relief, thinking that a few minutes more would see us consoled for the discomforts of our thirty days' journey with a brandy-and-soda, or its Russian substitute in the cool, shady reception-room, a glimpse of which we had caught while riding past the front of the house. A stalwart Cossack

answered our summons. He was a rough, surly fellow. My knowledge of the Russian language is limited, but I knew enough to understand that M. Shishmaroff was away—that no one knew when he would return—and that he should have the letter (which in despair I was holding out) when he did. With this information, given with scant courtesy, the military janitor calmly proceeded to shut the door in our faces. Luckily for us, however, the arrival of a third party on the scene completely changed the aspect and position of affairs, the new comer being no less than our sulky friend's wife, a burly, rosy-cheeked female of some forty summers, whose face it did one good to see after the bilious, yellow-cheeked dames of China and the Gobi. There was no mistaking this one—Russia—and Northern Russia too, was written in every line of it. She was indeed a friend in need. It was fortunate for us that the altercation at the gate had become loud enough to attract her attention, causing her to desist from the occupation she was engaged in, of washing her last-born at the pump, and hasten down to the gate to see what was the matter. Whether our personal appearance or the prospect of sundry copeks did it, I know not, let us hope the former. The fact remains

that in less time than it takes me to write it, she had hurled her lord and master on one side, flung wide open the gates, and led our ponies in. She then signed to us to dismount, and, taking us each by the hand, led us into a cottage situated in the centre of the courtyard, and about fifty yards distant from the Consulate.

The lady evidently, to use a vulgar term, wore the breeches, for the partner of her joys and sorrows offered no resistance whatever when she ordered him, after unsaddling and watering our ponies, to set off at once with my card and the letter of introduction to where M. Shishmaroff was staying on a shooting excursion some thirty versts off. The poor wretch went like a lamb, and I must own it was with some satisfaction that we saw our quondam enemy ride through the green gates and into the blazing sun while we sat in the cool red-tiled ottage, comfortably discussing a dish of ham and gs and home-made bread, washed down by copious libations of quass, and topped up by a bowl of rich thick cream, which the good soul insisted on our drinking, whether we liked it or not. Think of this, O dyspeptics, and ponder when I add that we felt no ill effects. Such are the practical

results of a month in the Gobi desert on the human frame and digestion.

The long sunny day wore slowly away. As we knew some hours must elapse before the sergeant could possibly return, Lancaster and I extended ourselves on many chairs, and with a box of excellent cigarettes (the sergeant's) between us, settled down to a thoroughly lazy afternoon. The sensation of absolute quiet and rest was little short of delicious after the wear and tear we had been leading for nearly a month—days of dirt and discomfort, nights of sleeplessness and misery. It was worth all the hardship we had undergone to experience the sense of relief and rest that long, still summer's day in the Russian Consulate at Ourga. It was hard to realize that one was still in the Chinese Empire. The clean cottage, with its cool red-brick floor, bright copper saucepans, chintz window-curtains, and flower-bedecked window-sills of to-day were such a contrast to the grimy smoke-discoloured yourts, stuffy, vermin-infested camel-carts of yesterday. I caught myself more than once wondering if the past voyage was not all a dream, from which I had awoke in some solitary wayside cottage in far-away England. The illusion was

but slowly dispelled when waking from a somewhat heavy nap (for which the mixture of quass and cream was no doubt answerable), I found the good-wife bustling about among her pots and pans, two curly-haired, rosy-cheeked brats clinging to her skirts, and the kettle singing merrily on the hob.

The sergeant returned about six o'clock with a note from M. Shishmaroff, written in French, and begging us make ourselves at home in the Consulate till his arrival on the morrow, an invitation we were not slow to avail ourselves of. The caravan had by this time arrived, and we were able, after a delicious bathe, to get a complete change of clothes, a luxury we had not enjoyed for more than three weeks. We were one mass of bug and flea-bites from head to foot, but a little ammonia soon set this right. The portmanteaus, too, were swarming with camel-ticks, and the next morning was mainly devoted to fumigating and trying to get rid of these pests—no easy matter.

Though luxuriously furnished and fitted up with every modern appliance and comfort, the house of the Russian Consul at Ourga is a plain-looking stone building, with wings on either side, the one serving as a chapel, the other as

quarters for the half-dozen Cossacks forming the Guard. The windows of the drawing-rooms looked on to a garden, spacious and well laid out. Roses, geraniums, heliotrope, mignonette, and other flowers grew in profusion along the borders of the neat gravel-paths, and round the little green wooden kiosk, where after dinner Lancaster and I drank our coffee and smoked cigarettes as we watched the sun set behind the sacred hills, and the white city grow grey in the dusk. A more picturesquely situated one can scarcely be imagined than Ourga, in the midst of a fertile green plain watered by the blue waters of the Tola, and surrounded by an amphitheatre of undulating wooded hills, conspicuous among them being the "Sacred Mountain," with its dark fir-trees and little temples, where the buddhist hermits, tired of the pomps and vanities of the world, retire to spend their last days mortifying the flesh and turning prayer-wheels.

We went out before it grew quite dark, and had a look at the ponies. Both were enjoying the sweet fresh grass, and seemed as contented with their comfortable quarters outside as their masters were in. Little Karra, as soon as he saw us, gave a

shrill neigh of welcome, and bucked away from us in a manner that speedily set my mind at rest on his account; while the gluttonous Chow never desisted for a second from the occupation that he was best fitted for, that of filling his inside. We passed the European cemetery on the way back, eight or ten roughly made graves, mere mounds of earth, with huge stones heaped on them to keep away the dogs. The crevices between were riddled with holes where rats had tried to get at the bodies. Only one grave boasted the smallest attempt at adornment, a white wooden cross with black letters, bearing the name and age of a young Russian girl who had died in Ourga a few weeks back. I could not help wondering if the poor child ever realized, during lifetime, that this lonely, neglected spot would ever be her last resting-place. The graves looked weird and uncanny in the dusk, and one was glad to leave the place and return to the Consulate; where, as we entered, we heard in the courtyard, the sharp, shrill words of command in Russian, as our friend the sergeant set the watch for the night. Even in the cosy, well-lit drawing-room it was hard to shake off the uncomfortable feeling of depression and undefined apprehension that never

quite left one in Ourga. Whether it be the climate or surroundings of the place, I know not; but every European traveller who has visited the Mongolian capital mentions having experienced the same sensation.

M. Shishmaroff arrived next day, a spare, wizened little man about sixty years of age, clean-shaved, with long, wiry grey hair, and a complexion the colour of a walnut. Colonel Petroff, the commander of the Guard, a red-faced, burly Cossack officer, accompanied him. They had been away for a three days' fishing expedition, and their baskets were laden with fine trout and "Tai-Ming" from the Tola. The latter is a species of large pike, but, unlike it, is caught only in running streams. It is delicious eating. Curiously enough, though this fish is caught throughout Siberia to the very foot of the Oural mountains on the Asiatic side, it is never found in European Russia.

Both our hosts gave us a true Russian welcome; and though the colonel spoke but few words of French, we mutually managed to supply by signs what we lacked in language. The Consul himself spoke French fluently. Although he had held the post he now occupied for more than twenty years, much

of his early life had been spent in Central Asia, in the service of the Russian Government. "But I never wish to leave Ourga," he said, when I one day casually remarked that the life must be rather a dull one for a man of his talents and culture. "I am passionately fond of my books. I enjoy the finest climate in the world. I am madly fond of fishing, and get as much as I want of the finest sport in the world in the Tola hard by. Above all, I am my own master, and as you English say, 'Monarch of all I survey.' What can a man wish for more?" And I could not but admit there was some truth in his reasoning.

The Cossack colonel was a character. I verily believe he slept in his uniform, spurs and all. His duties appeared light enough. It is not a great tax on a man's energy to command and drill six men, yet was he by no means content with his lot. Often (after dinner) when the good old Consul had exhausted his Central Asian anecdotes, and retired to his books and fishing flies, our military friend would fling open his tunic, and, throwing himself at full length on an easy chair, bewail his fate, and curse the ill-luck that had ever brought him to Ourga. "What a

place! What pigs, these Mongols!" he would cry in execrable French, at the same time pouring down draughts of fiery Vodka that would have made any one but a Russian purple in the face. "Ah! mes amis! you are fortunate, you go to Kiakhta! Beautiful Kiakhta! What fun! What gaiety! What women! Ah! mon dieu! Would that I could accompany you!" Occasionally, very late in the evening, he would pull out of his tunic and kiss with much effusion a tawdrily-coloured miniature of a lady with a countenance as of the rising sun, and what looked like two large black holes for eyes. "I shall marry her some day," he would say, gazing pensively at the portrait, while his eyes filled with tears—and Vodka. "Some day, my little Olga, you will be mine." I never interrupted our military friend's rhapsodies, or inquired as to her stature, but, judging from length of face and size of feature, Olga must have been misshapen if she stood anything under six foot high in her stockings.

We rode through Ourga next day, and found it a dull, unpicturesque city. There are no shops or stalls in the streets, none of the colour and movement that make most Oriental places so picturesque. A more melancholy, depressing place I have seldom seen; one

sees nothing on all sides but palisades about nine feet high, rough pine-tree stems, stuck into the ground close together, and thickly plastered together with clay. The dwellings of the inhabitants are almost entirely hidden by these rough wooden walls. The thousands of brilliantly coloured prayer-flags, covered with Mongolian and Tibetan characters, give a spurious look of gaiety to the place, which is soon dispelled upon looking around again at the silent, desolate-looking streets. The latter, though unpaved, were clean and regularly laid out, debouching frequently into open spaces of waste land, or squares. Erected in most of the latter were a number of open sheds, with what looked like huge wooden barrels inside them, but which we afterwards discovered were prayer-wheels, hollow cylinders filled with prayers and petitions to Buddha. We must have seen over a thousand of these scattered about Ourga, for public use. They varied considerably in size, from those ten to twelve feet high, great ponderous things that took three or four men to turn them, to others not longer than a man's hand, affixed to the street corners. These wheels are never at rest, men and women pause, as they hurry along the streets, to give a turn

to each as they pass them, and as one encounters one every twenty yards or so, the amount of prayers turned out during the day in Ourga must be something enormous. Prayer in Mongolia is all done by motive power, and we noticed water-wheels and windmills thickly covered with sacred characters. None of the people dreamt of passing one in the street without giving it a turn. Some seemed to make up praying parties; for we once saw two women and three men, grinding away at a big wheel near the Kootookta's palace, for at least half an hour without cessation. Some of the more devout turned miniature wheels in the left hand, while they pushed round the bigger ones with the right.

Thoughts of death and of a future state are the chief topics of conversation in this weird city, and religious ceremonies and duties form the chief occupation of the inhabitants, who go about their business, in solemn silence and with long faces that contrast strangely with the gaudy dresses and ornaments in which they are clad. A Mongol may be as cheerful and boisterous as he pleases in the desert, but once in the capital he must put on his best clothes, and observe a reserved, silent manner in accordance with the solemn surroundings. Many of the women

were beautifully dressed and covered with handsome gold and silver ornaments. They had in Ourga a curious way of dressing the hair, that we had not seen in the desert. A head-dress of solid silver, studded with coral and turquoise, fits flat, and closely to the head. From under this their hair was brought out at right angles to the head in a solid band about six or seven inches broad. This was kept stiff by a plentiful application of mutton fat and other substances, and kept out by three broad wooden bands. At the shoulders it was gathered up and allowed to fall down in front of each shoulder in a single plait. Their painted faces, flat noses, and beady black eyes, in conjunction with this strange head-dress, gave them a most grotesque appearance, and utterly spoilt any pretension to good looks they may have had, although with the exception of Tsaira, I did not see a single good-looking woman or girl throughout Mongolia. Ourga is said, notwithstanding, to be the most immoral city, of its size, in the world.

Perhaps one of the most curious characteristics of Ourga is the silence that reigns. There is here none of the hum or bustle usually found in a place where some thousands of human beings are

gathered together. No sound, even at mid-day, breaks the solemn stillness but the eternal creak of prayer-wheels and tolling of deep-toned gongs, save when a discordant blast of horns announces the celebration of some ceremony at the Kootookta's Palace, or a tea-caravan jingles and rattles noisily through the quiet streets and squares on its way to Siberia or China.

The chief products of Ourga appeared to be beggars and dogs. The latter are exceptionally large and ferocious, so much so that Europeans always ride when obliged to go into Ourga. On foot one stands a very fair chance of being torn to pieces by the huge, savage brutes, who do not, however, harm or take any notice of the natives. The beggars fairly swarm—loathsome, abject wretches, many of them covered with sores, and quite naked. Wet or dry, hot or cold, they live in the open, subsisting on alms, or whatever offal they can pick up. We saw two or three lying dead by the roadway. No one seemed to take any notice of the corpses save dogs and vultures. Thousands of the latter perpetually hover over Ourga, the largest I have ever seen, and as bold as brass. It is a common thing to see people returning from market

have their provisions snatched out of their hands and carried off by the huge birds. I could not believe this, till I saw it myself. No one harms them. The first precept of Buddhism is "Thou shalt not kill," and although this rule is sometimes broken in the desert, an infringement of it in the city of the Kootookta would meet with summary punishment.

The palace of the Kootookta and Lamasery or Buddhist monastery are the only buildings of any size or importance in Ourga. We managed to get permission, through M. Shishmaroff, from the Grand Lama of Mongolia to visit the temple attached to the palace. We were very curious to see the Kootookta himself, but one might as well have tried to gain admission to the presence of the Emperor of China. He was moreover absent on a pilgrimage to a mountain shrine, some hundred miles off, during our stay.

The temple itself is a whitewashed, wooden building, with a pink and blue striped dome, surmounted by a huge gilt ball. There are no windows. It was some time on entering before we could make out the huge figure of Buddha; for two guttering oil wicks only just made darkness visible.

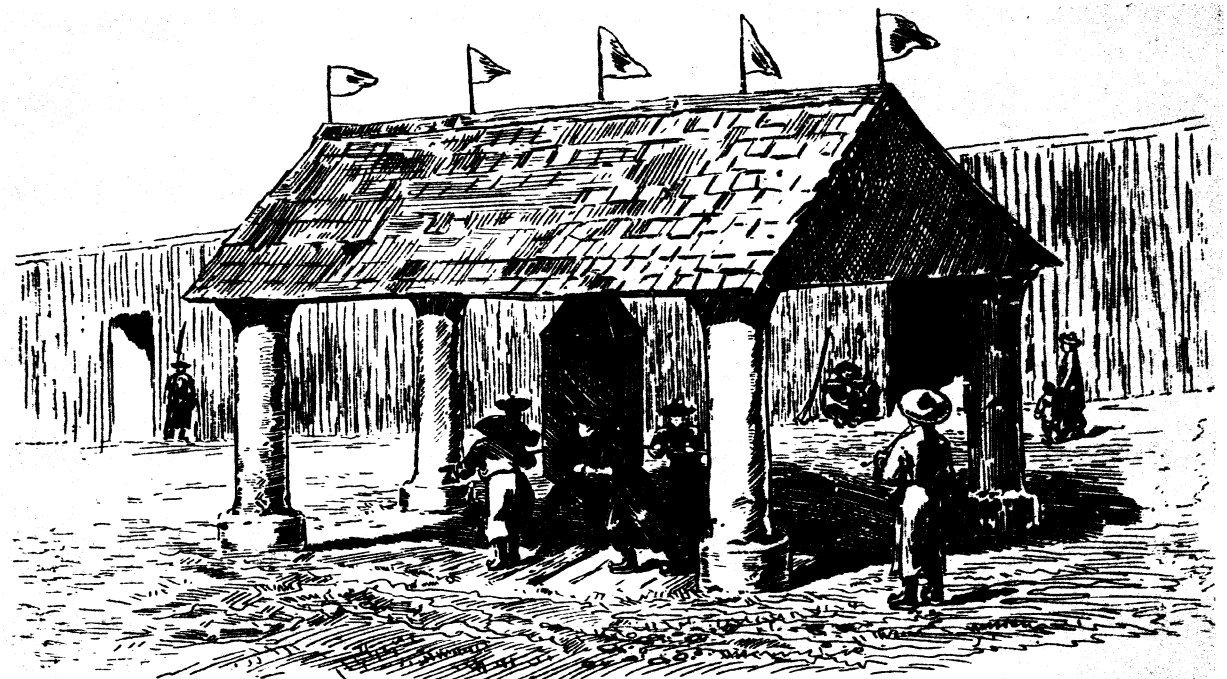
The idol, which is of gilt bronze, and represented seated, is one of the largest in the world. I could not ascertain its exact height, but we measured one of the hands, and found it six feet long, while the rest of the body is in the most perfect proportion. Surrounding it were five life-sized wooden figures in Mongol dress, which startled one not a little at first, they looked so like human beings in the dim light, their faces and hands being made of wax and painted flesh colour. Ranged round the walls from floor to roof were a thousand small gilt idols, each in its own glass-covered niche, while from the dome hung some twenty or thirty large silk prayer-flags beautifully worked with Tibetan and Mongolian characters in gold. Some were fairly rotting with age. At the right of the figure stood the Kootookta's throne, a tawdry-looking light green erection thickly covered with ill-painted flowers and landscapes, like a shooting-gallery at a fair, which detracted not a little from the beauty of the place. We could not see the face of this huge figure, which was lost in the darkness high up in the dome, but M. Shishmaroff told us it is of great beauty. Where this huge figure was cast or how it ever got to Ourga, does not transpire. It is of enormous

antiquity, and was placed there long before the "White Barbarian" ever set foot in these regions.

Two yellow-clad Lamas, with shaven heads and bare feet, came in as we were leaving, to trim the lamps and collect the alms and offerings that had been left at the feet of Buddha during the day. They seemed rude, ill-conditioned fellows enough, and by no means pleased to see us, nor did the rouble which Petroff gave them elicit anything but a sulky grunt of thanks. "Canaille va!" said the Cossack, with a fierce twist of his moustache, as we emerged into the open air, "we shall teach you a lesson some day," a remark that set me thinking. There is probably no race so jealous of its religion and customs and so intolerant of a stranger's interference as the Mongols. It was with the utmost difficulty that I managed to procure a small prayer-wheel about five inches long (although there were probably thousands of such in Ourga), and then only through the mediation of the Consul, to whom it was given, not sold to, by the owner. Though there are five or six of these miniature wheels in every tent, one never sees them exposed for sale, all being made in the Lama monasteries. It

was getting dusk as we mounted our ponies to return to the Consulate. This seemed to be the favourite hour for prayer in Ourga, for the thirty or more large prayer-wheels in front of the temple were all in full swing, three or four men and women to each. The creaking and grinding of the spindles was deafening, while the two sloping wooden platforms in front of the palace, used for the purpose of public worship, were covered with prostrate forms at evening prayer.

The palace, an imposing brick building of Tibetan architecture, stands hard by the temple, with which it is connected by a covered way built to screen the Kootookta from the vulgar gaze, when he goes to his devotions or a council of Lamas. The residence of the human god is handsome, though somewhat gaudy, its white façades being picked out with blue, crimson, and gold. The approach is through two archways of Chinese architecture, at thirty yards' interval, richly carved and coloured light green and vermilion. It is only in winter that the Kootookta lives in the capital. In early spring he is taken in state by the Lamas to his summer palace, about five miles away, on the banks of the clear, swift-running Tola and under



A STREET PRAYER-WHEEL AT OURGA.

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the very shadow of the sacred mountain. Here the time is spent in prayer and meditation till the return of autumn.

We rode past some tents pitched on the open space in front of the palace, an encampment of pilgrims which had arrived in Ourga the week before from Manchuria. One tent, that of their chief, was of green silk, and richly ornamented with gold hangings inside and out. They seemed cheery, good-tempered fellows, and gave us a pleasant "good night" as we passed them, seated outside their tents discussing the evening meal round their camp fires. Half a dozen camels and a couple of ponies formed their caravan. They had taken more than three months to do the journey, and were setting out again to return home the following day.

The day had been close, and a shower of rain towards sundown had made the atmosphere steamy and depressing, as we rode slowly home through the twilight to the Consulate. It was Petroff who first called my attention to a faint sickly odour I had noticed on and off all the afternoon during our peregrinations, a hot pungent smell as of decaying matter, which I had detected

in my bedroom at the Consulate the day before, and which seemed to pursue one everywhere in and about Ourga. "You had better light a cigarette," said the colonel, offering me his case. "It is always worse on these damp evenings."

"Do you mean to say the Consul has not told you of our Golgotha," he continued, as soon as we were fairly alight, in reply to my innocent query of how "it" was occasioned. "Why, it is the sight of the place. There is just time before dinner; we will ride home that way."

I was no longer surprised after my visit to "Golgotha," as Colonel Petroff facetiously termed the place where hundreds of corpses lay rotting above ground, that the city of Ourga did not smell as sweet as one could wish. My only surprise is, after visiting the spot in question, that plague is not always raging in a city where the inhabitants never dream of burying their dead, but carry them to a spot not three hundred yards from the gates, and there let them slowly decompose in the open air.

It would be impossible to imagine a more horrible spectacle than met our eyes on arriving at Golgotha, an open space or cleft between two low

green hillocks just outside Ourga, a valley literally crammed with corpses in every stage of decomposition, from the bleached bones of skeletons that had lain there for years, to the disfigured, shapeless masses of flesh that had been living beings but a few days or hours ago. The moon shed a pale, unearthly light over the grinning skulls and grey, upturned faces of the dead, some of whom lay stark and stiff just as they had been left by their friends, others with their blue shrouds ragged and torn, with disfigured faces and twisted limbs, lying in the horribly grotesque positions in which the dogs or wolves had dragged them. Near us was the body of a woman that had lain there but a few hours, Petroff said, judging from the clean and untorn appearance of her shroud. A little further off a number of huge dogs were fighting and snarling over the remains of a child. Overhead great carrion birds were flapping their huge black wings, occasionally swooping down, with a hoarse croak, to bury beak and talon in some newly arrived corpse. The very ground we trod was composed of human bones which crunched under our ponies' feet as we rode a short distance up the narrow, ghastly defile. The stench was awful. I can never think of

the place even now without a shudder, and devoutly wish I had never seen it.

A Mongol when ill has but a poor chance of recovery in Ourga. He had far better be alone and deserted in the plains than handed over to the tender mercies of the Death Lamas. There is a house or shed in Ourga near the Lamasery specially set apart for the dying, for it is considered the worst possible luck for a Mongol to die in his own tent. The dwelling, should this occur, is looked upon as accursed for evermore, and its inmates shunned like lepers by their neighbours. Thus it frequently happens that a poor wretch is bundled off without ceremony to the "dying shed" long before there is any need for it. As the "Death Lamas," who receive him, do everything for the cure of his soul and nothing for the good of his body, the invalid has a bad time of it. It is not considered the proper thing to leave the "Death Chamber" alive, and few do so, however slight their ailment when they are once admitted. We tried hard, but were not allowed to enter the sacred precincts, nor is any one who is not of the Buddhist faith and *in extremis*. The outside world is therefore ignorant of the rites and

ceremonies practised therein by the Lamas, but the tortures suffered by the unhappy patients is pretty apparent to any passer-by, judging from the groaning and moaning that we heard issuing from this gruesome dwelling. When dead, everything the patient possesses becomes the property of the Lamas who have attended him. He is stripped naked, wrapped in a coarse blue cotton shroud, and given up to his friends, who bear him away to Golgotha, and there leave him to the mercy of the elements, dogs, and vultures. Instances have been known of men and women recovering and returning from the ghastly spot to their homes. The Mongol is, at any rate, free from an evil which always more or less threatens us of superior civilization—that of being buried alive.

I had not much appetite for dinner that evening, a meal we always partook of strictly *à la Russe*, which means, literally speaking, any amount of rich, greasy food, but no drink to wash it down with. However thirsty one might be, wine, beer, and water were tabooed from the dinner and breakfast table. Each guest had his small liqueur-glass, but no tumblers, or wine-glasses. In front of the Consul stood a miniature battery of Vodka,

Kümmel, and brandy bottles, and on these he rang the changes, replenishing our glasses with the contents of one or the other till the close of the meal, when the hissing Samovar was brought in and tea brewed. Our mouths by this time resembled a burning fiery furnace, and one was glad of a draught of the cup that cheers, hot and unrefreshing as it was. Sometimes "Koumiss," or fermented mares' milk, was handed round, a drink of which the colonel and Consul partook largely, but the violent attack of indigestion that half a glass brought on deterred me from ever drinking the vile stuff, which tastes exactly like butter-milk gone bad twice. It was not till bedtime that we were really able to slake our thirst with a cool draught of our own whisky and water from the bedroom decanter. This strange custom seemed to prevail throughout Siberia. Thirst is a sensation apparently unknown to Russians, and I never saw either the Consul or Petroff drink wine except when once, after a more than usually late night, the latter opened a bottle of champagne the following morning in our honour, and to drink to his speedy union with the fair Olga.

We visited Maimachin the following day. Kiakhta and other frontier-towns all have their

Maimachins, a name derived from two Chinese words signifying "Maima," trade, and Ching, "town," for it is here that the Mongols purchase their stores, clothing, and provisions. Although distant only a mile from the capital, there are probably no two places in the world so utterly different in appearance and character as these. Of the ten thousand inhabitants, eight thousand at least are Chinese, merchants of various kinds, and *all men.* There is not a Chinese female of any sort or kind in the place, for the latter are forbidden by the laws of their country to accompany their husbands or male relatives into Mongolia, or indeed to go anywhere north of the Great Wall of China. The consequence of this is that many of the Maimachinites have intermarried with Mongol women, a circumstance that debars them from ever again entering the Chinese empire without special permission from the Court of Pekin.

Maimachin is a neatly-built town enclosed in a brick-battlemented wall about fifteen feet in height. The streets were, like those of all Chinese cities, abominably dirty, but it presented for all that a very favourable contrast to sad, sombre Ourga. The houses are of brick for the most part, well-built,

substantial dwellings with gardens and courtyards, while on the outskirts of the city trees (planted by the ever-industrious Chinaman) and carefully tended market and flower gardens relieve the monotony of the dead green plain. A Chinaman much resembles a Frenchman in one respect; put him into a swamp in Mid-Africa, and he will make his immediate surroundings ornamental, or at any rate as pretty as circumstances will allow.

The Temple of Confucius at Maimachin was a pleasant contrast to the gaunt, whitewashed structure of Buddha at Ourga. Though much smaller in dimensions, it was a model of symmetry and beauty, and embellished with carvings and sculpture which it seemed a sin to have covered with the eternal gold and vermilion so dear to every celestial's heart. In front was a little courtyard overhung with weeping willows and paved with smooth grey tiles, round the edge of which ran broad beds of roses and mignonette, while in the centre a fountain plashed lazily into a basin of cool green water, covered with clusters of great white water lilies. Hung around the roof of the temple were hundreds of small gilt bells with sails attached to their clappers, which at the slightest breath of

air produced a sweet musical sound. It was a relief to sit in this pretty cool retreat and forget for a while the dirty, dismal city with its leprous population and unburied dead not two thousand yards off!

Moses and Co. had only contracted to bring us as far as Ourga, so we now set about getting fresh camels for the journey to Kiakhta, a distance of over two hundred miles. We were not anxious to prolong our stay in Ourga. One walk through the city had more than satisfied our curiosity, and the unsavoury whiffs that came in at our open windows whenever the wind was blowing in from the direction of Golgotha, only made us the more anxious to hasten our departure, notwithstanding the kind and pressing invitation of our good-natured friend and guide, Petroff, to stay a few days longer and have some trout-fishing, a sport I have never been particularly fond of, though I believe it is to be had in perfection in the waters of the Tola, judging from the large basketsful M. Shishmaroff brought in almost daily.

We procured camels with less difficulty than I had anticipated, though not without a good deal of haggling and discussion as to price with the greasy

old Mongol whose property they were. The old robber insisted on payment beforehand, and insisted on its being made in *brick tea*, which gave us an enormous amount of trouble and annoyance. We managed it at last, with the aid of M. Shoolingin, a Russian tea-merchant, but the calculation entailed a consumption of tea, Vodka, and cigarettes that gave us a headache for two days afterwards! It took us nearly three hours to convert our Kalgan bills into the requisite amount of the awkward countersome material that passes current for coin in Ourga and throughout Mongolia. The tea is of the coarsest kind. After being submitted to a pressing and drying process, it is cut up into bricks of 25 cents, 50 cents, and $1 value. The latter are nearly two feet long. The cost of the camels for our journey to Kiakhta was $35, so the old Mongol had to call in two others to help him carry away his spoil, under which he staggered away with a grin and a leer that made us doubt whether he had not swindled us, which we afterwards discovered he had to the amount of some $15. Bank-notes have lately been introduced by the Russian tea-firms in Ourga, representing so many bricks of tea each. These would do away with much of the difficulty attending

the carting about of the present heavy, clumsy currency, but the natives will have nothing to do with them.

We left Ourga at 5 a.m. on the morning of the 3rd of August. Our caravan was now considerably reduced in size, for it needed but four camels (besides the two for the carts) to carry our few remaining stores. Early as it was, the Consul and Petroff were at the gate to bid us good-bye. The poor colonel looked very sad and down in the mouth. He was thinking, no doubt, of Olga, for whom he gave me innumerable tender messages. As they were confided verbally, and in Russian, it is perhaps as well that I never made the acquaintance of the belle of "Beautiful Kiakhta." She would have been somewhat confused at my interpretation of her fiancé's messages, and might have taken his declarations of undying love and devotion for my own. As the caravan moved slowly out of the gate on the second stage of our weary journey, the guard gave us three hearty cheers, and we drank a final Vodka with Petroff, arranging to meet, if all went well, the following year in Petersburg, a place the gay, light-hearted soldier seemed far more suited to than the dreary desert-city in which we left him.

Pleasing indeed was this our first experience of Russian friendship and hospitality, nor had we ever cause to alter our opinion. With all our vaunted hospitality, I doubt if even the English are not behind the Russians in these two qualities, which I have never seen so general as in Russia and Siberia.

A caravan of three hundred ox-carts laden with timber and furs passed the gates as we were leaving, going in the contrary direction to ourselves. They were bound for Dolonnor in Manchuria, a town, Petroff told us, they would be entering about the same date as we should be nearing the English Channel at Calais.

Our way lay straight through Ourga. I could not help wondering, as we passed Golgotha for the last time, and noticed the thick white steam rising from it, that the place is not one continual hotbed of cholera and typhus. Yet it is not so. The clear, dry, rarified atmosphere and hot sunshine in summer and severe frost and cold in winter do much to mitigate the unhealthy vapours and stench that constantly hang over the city. Ourga is as a matter of fact extremely healthy, and cholera is, and always has been, unknown in the capital of Mongolia.

Both our camel-drivers being Lamas, they asked

permission to halt for a few minutes as we passed the Temple Gates, while a couple of rascally-looking priests came out and blessed the caravan, an operation which was witnessed with great interest by the bystanders, who abandoned their occupation of wheel-turning and came up and leisurely examined the inside of our carts, our clothes, boots, rifles, &c., with apparent interest. The ceremony of blessing us consisted in throwing a couple of gourds of arrack and some grains of millet over the leading and last camel, a proceeding that is supposed to ensure a rapid and prosperous journey. It was rather a failure in our case, for it took us exactly a week to get to Kiakhta, a voyage usually accomplished with ease in three days by the Russians at Ourga.

Three separate ranges of mountains lay between us and Kiakhta, one, the "Bain Gol" pass, so steep as to necessitate the using of bullocks to drag the huge unwieldy carts across, for the Mongolian camel has the greatest objection to pulling weights up-hill, be it ever so slight a gradient. Two broad and swift rivers, the "Kharra" and "Irul," have also to be crossed, the former forded, the latter by ferry. Shishmaroff specially

cautioned us not to attempt the passage of the Irul after dark, for the stream is dangerous owing to sunken rocks, and the ferry old and unsecure.

The going was very hard the first two days and the shaking in the carts far worse than anything we had yet experienced. To compensate us for the discomfort and fatigue, however, we passed through some of the loveliest mountain scenery I have ever seen. Game was abundant the whole way, hundreds of partridges (the sand-grouse is not met with here) and hares, with an occasional shot at a golden pheasant with which the dense forests abounded. We passed the second day a small pond or lake, alive with duck and sheldrake. Stopping the caravan for a few moments, we bagged a couple, and on the way back two couple of snipe from the marsh surrounding the water. Though we had to wade waist deep for nearly a quarter of a mile, it was worth the trouble. There must have been at least thirty duck on the pond, which was barely twenty yards wide.

We had now nothing to complain of with regard to excess of energy and activity on the part of our drivers. Our difficulty with the new Mongols was not to get them to stop, but to go on. The leader, a

fat, stumpy old fellow, with eyes like an owl, slept calmly and peacefully on his camel's back throughout the day, only to awake at the midnight halt from which hour, till we started again at six, he would devote himself to gorging, smoking innumerable pipes, and saying, or rather singing, his prayers, an operation that kept us awake the greater part of the night. I verily believe we went quite double the distance we should have done, owing to this old wretch's sleepiness and idiotcy. Something was always going wrong. Water running short, packs falling off, the caravan filing quietly away in a direction totally different to that it should have taken, while the old fellow partook of nature's sweet restorer, blissfully unconscious of our cries and threats. No amount of shouting would wake him—indeed, nothing short of pulling him off his camel. At such times he would look at one with an injured stare, shake himself into his seat, and go off again, only to fall asleep a few hundred yards further on, when the operation of pulling off had to be repeated. The second driver was, luckily, a bright, intelligent boy of about twenty, who saved things from going utterly to the bad. Had it not been for him, we should even now

be vainly endeavouring to reach the Russo-Chinese frontier.

I do not think we got more than twelve hours' sleep in all during the journey from Ourga to Kiakhta, and this was the greatest discomfort with which one had to contend. Even when, after an uninterrupted spell of hard work for twelve hours, the caravan halted at midnight till daybreak, sleep was often impossible from the very knowledge that in five hours' at most one would have to be on the tramp again. Besides the hammering in of tent-pegs, chopping of firewood, and last, but not least, the semi-musical prayers of our somnolent driver often lasted till four or half past, and put sleep out of the question. A Mongol is never so wakeful and active as at night, and if he is musically inclined, always indulges this propensity in the darkness, when all right-minded people are courting the drowsy god. Expostulating was useless, as any one who has ever been brought in contact with this strange race will understand.

We were now a good deal bothered by mosquitoes and sandflies, an annoyance from which we had been free throughout Northern China, and the desert proper. Now, however, these pests attacked us

night and day in myriads, and we suffered a good deal from their bites, which were unusually severe and poisonous.

Our younger camel-driver carried a very original prayer-wheel, a sort of miniature windmill let into the butt-end of his thick, heavy whip. When set going and held against the wind, this ingenious contrivance would spin away without cessation for hours together. He was a devout youth, and it was a long time before I could induce him to part with it, but love of filthy lucre finally overcame religious scruples, and I managed to buy it of him on arrival at Kiakhta for a couple of roubles, under the strictest injunctions not to tell the "Old Sheep," as he irreverently termed the sleepy Lama.

We reached the banks of the Kharra at nine o'clock on the morning of the 6th of August. This river is a tributary of the Khon River, which has its source near the Kara Korum Mountains in central Mongolia, and after winding its course of nearly 700 miles, flows into the great inland sea of Lake Baikal, after watering the towns of Kiakhta and Selenginsk, where, however, it is not navigable. There was no ferry, but we managed to ford it pretty easily. The weather had been dry, and the

stream, which in time of flood is rapid and very dangerous, was never above our girths the whole way across. The water was beautifully clear, with a shingly bed, and we took the opportunity of filling the water-casks, not without a good deal of opposition from the Mongols, notwithstanding that the water had been filthy ever since leaving Ourga. This extraordinary people seem to prefer drinking out of a stagnant pool or well, in which a dead sheep or camel has been soaking for days, to filling the casks out of a pure running stream. On the banks of the river were three dirty, dilapidated yourts, empty, the first signs of a habitation we had seen since leaving Ourga.

Lovely weather had favoured us till now; bright hot sunshine tempered with a cool fresh breeze. But it was too good to last. About four o'clock to-day, the bright blue sky became overcast, and half an hour later, down came the rain, and continued steadily, and without cessation, till 2 a.m. The roofs of our carts, warped and cracked by the heat of the sun, leaked like sieves. But the weather, rough as it was, did not in the least affect my driver's somnolent propensities. I was awoke that night, about eleven, out of a fitful doze, by a

crash, to find that we were crossing a steep, precipitous range of hills, and that my cart was balancing itself on one wheel, on the edge of a precipice, the bottom of which was invisible. I could pretty well gauge the height, though, by the sound of a torrent dashing and foaming over some rocks at least a hundred feet below. I was only just in time to catch hold of his nose-string, and wrench the camel back into safety. In another moment the whole caravan would have toppled over. It was the old story. The Lama had been asleep. This last straw was too much, and in a fit of ungovernable temper, I pulled the old wretch off his camel, and sent him sprawling on his back on the stony pathway. But he took it perfectly coolly, merely picking himself up without a word, and with the usual stolid stare of mingled surprise and annoyance, calmly proceeded to clamber up again. Five minutes more and he was as sound asleep as ever. What could one do with such a creature, but give it up in despair! I took the precaution, however, though it still poured with rain, of walking till daylight.

A bright sunny morning made up for the discomforts of the night, and we were able, while fires

were being lit and tea prepared, to dry our clothes and mattresses in the sun, which as early as eight o'clock was too warm to be pleasant. The scenery throughout the day resembled one enormous deer-park. Grassy slopes, as smooth as a billiard-table, and every now and again large clumps of fir-trees, which grew so regularly, they looked as if art and not nature had placed them there; while on the horizon, green, undulating hills, covered with forests of dark pine-trees, cut the bright blue sky-line. The track occasionally led past clear broad sheets of water teeming with fish, occasionally through belts of copse-wood, of silver birch and hazel, the ground one blaze of hyacinths, wild roses, and pinks growing in the thick rich grass, with clear, narrow brooklets running here and there through the thick undergrowth. We saw a brace of pheasants in one of these woods, but too far off to get a shot. About mid-day we halted for dinner under a clump of fir-trees. The cattle grazing in the sunshine, the quiet stillness of the place, broken only by the droning of insects, and voices of children playing near some distant yourt, was intensely refreshing after our night of misery. What would not these hundreds of miles of splendid

pasture be worth at home? No wonder the Mongols are a contented race with such land as this, and no rent to pay!

Four o'clock the following morning saw us at the foot of the mountain, to cross which we were to abandon the camels and take to oxen. Sylvia was despatched in quest of the latter, but did not return with them till nearly three o'clock the following afternoon. We thus had a delay of nearly twenty-four hours, but were not altogether sorry, for the shaking and jolting of the past two days made one glad of a rest. We encamped close to a limestone mountain, about five hundred feet high, from the summit of which a huge piece of rock, quite a hundred feet in height, had become detached, and crumbling away as clean as if cut with a knife, had fallen on to the caravan-track immediately below. It was six o'clock by the time we had got the bullocks in and commenced the ascent of the pass, which, gradual at first, became very difficult long before we reached the summit. One bullock was harnessed to the shafts, the other to the axle of the wheel, but so severe was the strain the ropes continually broke on the way up. The cart and pack camels were in readi-

ness to take us on when we reached the other side. Though a distance of only five miles from where we encamped, they took nearly eight hours to do the journey.

The way lay at first through a narrow ravine thickly grown with pine and silver birch. Through the centre ran a clear running brook, plashing over limestone rocks and boulders, and almost hidden by ferns and wild flowers. Above us towered the almost perpendicular wall of rock that must be conquered before nightfall, if we wished to avoid camping out all night on some rocky ledge—not a pleasing prospect—for it was already bitterly cold out of the rays of the sun. I noticed here, growing in great luxuriance, a bright *yellow* poppy—a colour in which I had always imagined that flower was unknown. This part of the mountain also swarmed with enormous hares. We must have seen some thirty or forty, and could easily have bagged half a dozen, but Moses would not hear of it, or of our delaying the caravan for a moment to get out our guns. As the ascent was getting harder every moment, we did not argue the matter.

I think that was quite the worst bit of mountain work we did the whole journey. Every moment I

thought the bullocks would give in, or the carts go to pieces. The boulders they had to get over, holes and water-courses to get out of, would have seemed incredible to any one unacquainted with Mongolian travel. On foot it was bad enough, and we were glad we had sent on the ponies, for it would have been impossible to climb and lead them as well. Every ten minutes or so a halt was made for a quarter of an hour. Thus we toiled on, till half-past eight o'clock, when we found ourselves on the summit, after four hours of as hard, physical work as I ever experienced.

The moon had now risen, which made the view from the summit very picturesque. Round us on every side stretched away chains of lofty mountains, their limestone peaks gleaming white in the moonlight, while a grey, flaky mist half hid the deep gorges of pine and fir-trees at our feet. A bright light shining out of the darkness in the distance showed where our camels awaited us on the plain—twelve hundred feet below. We rested for an hour, to give the bullocks breathing-time, and then commenced the descent. It was a weird scene. A Chinese lantern just sufficed to make darkness visible, and show that we had halted by

the side of a huge cairn, about twenty feet high, formed of stones, bits of stick, mutton bones, and strewn here and there with bits of red, yellow, and white cloth covered with Tibetan and Mongol characters. As we left the spot, our Mongols, unable to find a stone, each picked up a branch of fir, and placed it reverently on the heap. These are looked on as offerings to the "God of travellers," who protects the faithful from peril while on a journey. We reached the camels again at ten o'clock. One tael did not seem exorbitant for the hiring of six bullocks, and the services of three extra Mongols, for that was the sum Jee Boo told me he paid them, and they seemed quite satisfied. Probably the greater part of that found its way into our trusty interpreter's pockets.

Our road was now clear to Kiakhta, and there were no further difficulties to be got over, excepting the Irul river—a broad, swift stream, the crossing of which is dangerous at certain seasons. Jee Boo, ever a Job's comforter, told us that the natives reported heavy rains, and if such was the case, we should certainly have a tough job of it. But he had so often cried "Wolf," we paid no heed to his statement.

We travelled on all night, halting at nine the next morning for tea and biscuits. Part of the work was very fatiguing, as we had to cross several miles of country thickly covered with huge mole-hills, over which the carts jolted terribly, for there was no beaten track. The shaking at last became so unbearable that we left the carts at 4 a.m., tired as we were, and walked till the morning halt. We passed, just after sunrise, a large wooden building, a monastery of Tibetan architecture, its white façades gaudy with blue and red stripes and a gilt cupola. As we passed, two or three Lamas came out and blessed the caravan in the usual manner, an operation which necessitated a stoppage of half an hour.

Nearly the whole of this day's work was through deep, drifting sand—in many places over the axles. At mid-day there was not a blade of grass or vegetation to be seen. This part of the country was, in fact, far more like one's idea of what a desert should be than anything we had come through in Gobi. In the midst of this sandy waste (about fifteen miles in length), we came to a green valley or oasis, fresh and beautiful. The descent to it (for it lay in a hollow whence not a particle of sand

was visible) was about fifty feet deep. Grass grew luxuriantly here, and a clear brook of running water springing from Heaven knows where, ran the whole length of the defile into a small lake or pond at the end—a dark, shady pool fringed with willows, and covered with white, broad-leaved water-lilies. Wild flowers of all kinds covered the roadway, among them the forget-me-not and marguerites of a delicate mauve colour. Although the sun had been hot and scorching out on the sand, the air struck like a cold bath the moment we entered this fertile valley, but so damp was the atmosphere, that our clothes were wringing wet when we emerged at the other end. The mosquitoes and sandflies, too, were the largest and most venomous I have ever seen or felt, and our faces and hands so inflamed that we had to stop the caravan and bathe them with ammonia, which, however, did little good, for we got no sleep for twenty-four hours after. The bites took days to heal. Game of all sorts, duck, teal, and widgeon appeared to abound in this "sleepy hollow," and we managed to bag a duck, which made a welcome addition to the usual menu of preserved meat and sardines.

The morning of the 8th August broke dull and

lowering, and about mid-day a thin rain commenced falling, which by degrees increased to a steady downpour at 4 a.m. We were to reach the Irul river at about sunset, and, if possible, cross before dark, but felt, if Jee Boo's prediction were true, that we should indeed have our work cut out. The woolly, grey clouds and leaden sky gave but little promise of a break in the weather. Our only prayer was that the wind might not rise, but in this we were also disappointed, for by the time we had reached the banks of the river, or rather the margin, for it had overflowed for a considerable distance, the sky was as black as ink, the rain coming down in sheets, and the wind blowing in violent gusts that threatened every moment to blow the carts clean over. To think of crossing that night would have been madness. To say nothing of the fact that another caravan was waiting to be ferried over before us, the ferryman would not answer for the strength of the rope holding out against the current and gale combined. Still, if the Gospodins liked, and did not mind risking it, the head man (who was a Bouriatte, and spoke Russian well,) would do what he could to get them over. The Gospodins, however, strongly

objected to risking it, and determined to make themselves as comfortable as circumstances and the last half-bottle of whisky would permit, till morning.

I thoroughly enjoyed that night's rest. Whether it was the consciousness that we had a really quiet night before us (I had given orders not to be "called" till nine), or the hot whisky and water, I know not, but I had not enjoyed such a night's rest since leaving Pekin. I only woke once during the night, woke to hear the rain still pattering on the roof, and to find myself lying in the usual pool of water, while the wind still howled mournfully round the carts. The sight of the river dashing by in a sheet of white foam was not reassuring, but did not interfere with my slumbers, for rolling myself in sheepskins, I slept away peacefully till past nine o'clock the next morning, when Jee Boo opened the door to let in a bright flood of sunshine and the welcome news that the rain had ceased.

The stream was still swollen from the incessant rain; but the caravan that had encamped next us had crossed at daylight in safety, with the exception of the loss of one bullock. Our

camels were taken to a ford about a mile up stream, and we preferred accompanying them to trusting ourselves to the rickety old boat and frayed, rotten-looking rope, for the new one had not yet arrived. The ferry itself did not look capable of carrying half a dozen men, much less a heavy, clumsy camel-cart. Arrived at the ford, however, the spectacle of the leading camel suddenly disappearing from view in a deep hole made us change our minds and return to the boat. The first cart had just been got in, and we leapt on board just as they were shoving off into the stream.

Little more than half way across, a huge snag or tree-trunk got entangled with the rope and impeded our passage. I thought it quite time to say my prayers, for, had the cart tilted over, we must have followed it. It was a trying moment. The deafening roar of the torrent, pale, scared faces of the Mongols, as they rushed to and fro screaming and yelling to each other, but doing nothing to lessen the strain on the rope, which, stretched to its utmost, threatened to snap every moment. At last one of the men, wiser and pluckier than the rest, rushed to the bows, and with a superhuman effort dislodged the heavy mass, and sent it tumbling

away down-stream, and we forged slowly ahead again, with a sigh of relief, for I fully expected our last hour had come.

We walked up to the ford again while the other carts were being got over. About fifty or sixty bullocks belonging to a tea-caravan were being driven across by men and women who were pelting them with stones until they leapt into the torrent, to emerge half dead and prostrate from fright and exhaustion about two hundred yards lower down. Many of the caravan people were women, some young and good-looking, though their costumes were more scanty than elegant. One, a pretty, bright-eyed girl of about sixteen, took a violent fancy to my brown boots, and it was only with the greatest difficulty I could prevent her from cutting them off my feet. The caravan, laden with furs from Irkoutsk, was bound for Pekin, and would probably be returning four months later with tea to Kiakhta.

We left the Irul at mid-day. Travelling was now easier, and the jolting scarcely perceptible on the hard, gravelly track that leads from the banks of this river right into the town of Kiakhta. Although the country is uncultivated, the scenery

we passed through would have compared favourably with the lovelier parts of Switzerland and the Tyrol. Green fertile plains, surrounded by chains of undulating fir-clad hills, occasional belts of forest with flowers and ferns in profusion, bubbling waterfalls splashing down the hill sides, through the moss-grown, ivy-clad boulders, then through vast plains of pasture again—such was the scenery we passed through the day before reaching Kiakhta. There grew, also, throughout this region (I saw it nowhere else) a long-stalked, star-shaped, violet flower, with a strong scent of heliotrope. The air was full of the scent for miles around, and one could see great violet patches of it on the green plain, stretching away at intervals to the horizon on every side. I doubt if there is a country in the world where wild flowers grow so luxuriantly as in parts of Mongolia.

The succeeding day (August 10th) we got into a sandy region again, with intervals of grass plain. Some of the drifts being of great depth, the camels had a bad time of it, and suffered severely from the heat. Poor little Karra could scarcely stagger along, and had Kiakhta been a couple of days further, I doubt if he would ever have reached

Siberia. Lancaster's cart seemed under a curse; for to-day, the driver being, as usual, asleep, the near wheel ran up a high sand-hillock and upset the whole machine, Lancaster being asleep inside at the time. It was luckily deep sand, or it must have been a nasty fall. It was fortunate, too, our journey was over, for the camel, falling under the shaft, had split it clean in two. I firmly believe the Mongol would have been sent to his fathers, had a revolver been handy, and I had the greatest difficulty in preventing my friend from going for him with the broken shaft.

About four o'clock a glittering speck on the horizon attracted our attention, which an hour later proved to be the spire of Kiakhta Cathedral. By six o'clock we were full in sight of the town of Maimachin, the Chinese settlement, its pagodas and quaint architecture standing out in striking contrast to the Russian cathedral, with its golden dome, the European stone-built houses, and regular streets and squares of Kiakhta. Skirting the wooden walls surrounding Maimachin, we find ourselves on a broad, level piece of ground about six hundred yards broad, with, on the right hand, a guard-house and high wooden gates, surmounted by

the Imperial Eagle, while to our left the Chinese flag, hoisted on to a long red pole, floats in front of the governor of Maimachin's residence. We are standing on neutral ground, and in another minute have passed the Cossack, who from the depths of a black and white sentry-box, eyes the caravan with a stolid, indifferent expression, but, curious to relate, does not ask for our passports. The first stage of our journey is over. We are in the Russian Empire.

CHAPTER VII.

KIAKHTA TO IRKOUTSK.

A SQUARE, whitewashed room, its walls and uncarpeted floor reeking with filth, and devoid of all furniture save a table and two hard, straight-backed chairs, and an overpowering smell of sewage from a cesspool beneath the open window, through which a crowd of shock-headed Siberian boys watch our every movement. An old man, in greasy rags and redolent of garlic, who resolutely refuses to allow us to enter even this fetid den unless the lodging-money is prepaid. No bed, no food, no drink, no washing appliances—such were the comforts awaiting us at the "Hotel Glembodski," Kiakhta, the only inn in the place.

It was disappointing, to say the least of it. We had passed well-built, luxurious-looking houses on

our way through the town, and expected to find, at any rate, the bare necessaries of life. Nay, more; when we saw the almost palatial houses of the tea-merchants surrounded by gardens and conservatories, neat, well-kept public gardens, smart carriages of every description, and men and women dressed in the latest European fashion, visions entered the mind of a really well-cooked dinner, washed down with iced champagne; but, alas! not for long. Ice there was, certainly, but we drank it in "quass;" while for food we had to fall back on our own stale provisions.

"Can we have anything to eat?" was our first question, when, having failed in getting any water to wash in, we made up our minds to "pig it" that night, and present our credentials to the governor of Kiakhta in the morning. But there was no food in the house, the old man said, and all the shops were shut. To-morrow they would be open at six, and we could breakfast early, he added, by way of consolation.

A pleasant welcome after a journey of eight hundred miles, I thought that night as I lay down in my sheepskins on the grimy floor, wondering whether it

would be as bad as this throughout Siberia. The stench, rats, and vermin, kept us awake more than half the night. I would have given a good deal to be back in mid-desert. There, at least, one had fresh air.

We were besieged next morning before eight o'clock by half a dozen Chinamen from Maimachin, who calmly walked in without knocking, and seating themselves on the ground, commenced to jabber away in Russian—not a word of which I could understand. I called for Jee Boo, and found they were tea-merchants, and had come to buy our samples. It was a long time before they could be persuaded that we had none to sell, never dreaming that any one could be mad enough to cross the Gobi Desert for pleasure!

It poured with rain all next day. Our ill-luck did not desert us, for on calling at the governor's house in the morning, we were told he was away, and would probably not return for a fortnight at least, by which time we hoped to be many miles from Kiakhta. M. Gribooshin, a tea-merchant, on whom I had a letter of credit, was also away shooting in Mongolia; but his clerk provided us with the necessary funds, and we left his luxurious mansion

with a sigh of regret to return wet and dispirited to our squalid room at the inn, and settle our plans for getting out of the dismal, inhospitable place as quickly as possible.

I have seldom passed a more miserable day. No fire (for it was cold and damp), no books, no food excepting some greasy soup, the ingredients of which I shudder to think of; and when night came on, no light but that from a flickering oil wick which just sufficed to make our wretched surroundings visible. I managed to glean from our host that he was a Polish exile, and had been sent here after the insurrection of 1864. If all his countrymen have the same notions of comfort, I thought, banishment to Siberia can affect them but little.

The town of Kiahkta is divided into two parts, Kiakhta, the town proper, where the governor or frontier commissioner lives, and where are situated most of the tea-warehouses and offices, and Troitzkosavsk, a suburb about half a mile distant, almost entirely composed of private houses belonging to the merchants. The population of Kiakhta, with Troitzkosavsk, is a little under six thousand, but this does

not include the Chinese settlement of Maimachin, containing four thousand souls, all of whom are men. There is not a woman or child in the place, the Chinese law forbidding wives to accompany their husbands beyond the Great Wall of China. We visited Maimachin, and found it far cleaner than most Chinese towns. There were but eight streets, all wide and well-drained. The houses are of wood and brick, and some of them gorgeously decorated with vermilion and gold. Many of the population spoke Russian, and all the wealthier merchants. I visited the house of one while he was employed in "tasting tea," by driving a hollow piece of metal into the chest like a cheese scoop, and drawing out a small sample.

Our hotel was situate in the main street of Troitzkosavsk, which is a sad, dreary-looking place. Most of the houses are of unpainted wood, which give it a sombre look; though the college, church, and principal merchants' houses are built of whitewashed brick, with bright green roofs, and detract somewhat from the depressing aspect around. Kiakhta is a terrible place for bells. They were eternally going, morning, noon, and night—not a

lively, cheery peal, but a slow, solemn tolling, like a continual passing-bell. But for this Troitzkosavsk is the sleepiest and most dead-alive town imaginable. Except, towards evening, when the population turn out *en masse* for a breath of fresh air, there is seldom a sound to break the dead silence that reigns in the unpaved, dusty street that constitutes its main thoroughfare, from morning till night.

Kiakhta is not unhealthy. It is not subject to the violent and sudden changes of temperature found further south in Mongolia. It seldom rains, and never snows. Travellers in winter have to drive out a distance of eight or ten miles before they can get into the sleigh which is to bear them to Irkoutsk, Tomsk, Yakoutzk, and other parts of Siberia. The coldest and hottest weather experienced in Kiakhta summer and winter are 95° and 33° below zero respectively, figures that may sound startling to the reader, but nothing compared to Yakoutzk, where in mid-winter it sometimes exceeds 58° below zero. The earth at the latter place is said to be always frozen below the surface to a depth of over thirty feet, summer and winter.

Five o'clock in the afternoon is the busiest part of the day in the frontier-city. Then it is that the whole population turns out, the wealthier part for its evening drive, the poorer to listen to the military band which plays every day throughout the summer in the public gardens. Had it not been for the motley crowd of Russians, Chinese, Mongolians, Bouriattes, and other queer races in their bright, gaudy costumes, one might have been in the gardens of some garrison-town in France or Germany, so civilized were all but the human surroundings. It was amusing to watch the female *élite* of Kiakhta, the wives and daughters of wealthy tea-merchants, dressed in the latest Paris fashions, flirting, talking scandal, and ruining their neighbours' reputations, just like their more civilized sisters ten thousand miles away in London or Paris. Equally interesting was it to stroll about among the crowd of Cossack officers, resplendent in white and gold, Mongol Tartars, in rags and silk, Siberian peasants in Russian dress, Chinese soldiers from Maimachin, Russian soldiers from Kiakhta, nursemaids with children and perambulators, and men in frock-coats and tall hats. The gardens at

Kiakhta were a sight worth seeing. It was hard to realize that the desert of Gobi is but a stone's throw from this scene of almost European civilization.

We took an affectionate farewell of Jee Boo two days after our arrival. The carts were returning to Kalgan, and as Chinamen have an innate horror of crossing the desert with strange Mongols, he had determined to go with them, though we offered him a good round sum if he would wait and see us out of Kiakhta, for I knew but a few words of Russian, certainly not enough to complete the purchase of our tarantass or travelling-carriage satisfactorily. He was obdurate, however, also the Mongols, so we had to make the best of it, trusting to find some one who could speak a few words of English, though that seemed improbable enough in Kiakhta.

But we found a friend in need, and when we least expected it. The town of Troitzkosavsk boasts a college, established and maintained by a private individual—an enormously wealthy gold-miner. One must have lived in a place where not a soul understands your native language to appreciate our delight when we met Professor R——, a German by birth, but professor of English at the college, who

had, by the way, only just arrived here, and who greeted us in our own tongue, one morning with a familiar "Good morning, gentlemen. I think I am addressing the two travellers from Pekin." Never did the English tongue sound so sweet to my ears, for we were now out of our dilemma, and accepting the professor's invitation, followed him home to his rooms for breakfast.

The world is small indeed, for Professor R—— and we had many mutual friends, whose names sounded odd in the mouth of a stranger at what might well be called the uttermost ends of the earth. Our new acquaintance had had a strange career before drifting to this remote part of Asia. By birth a German, and a gentleman's son, he had left home when a lad, and enlisted in the 22nd Regiment, where he was promoted to the rank of sergeant. Leaving the service in 1870, he was appointed teacher of the German language at Southsea Naval College, a post he afterwards left to assist Mr. F——, of Storrington, Sussex, a well-known private tutor. Professor R—— had left Storrington to take up an appointment as professor of German at the Royal Naval College, Petersburg, from

whence he had been promoted to Senior Professor of English at the College of Kiakhta. A born linguist, Herr R—— was proficient in English, French, Russian, Italian, and last, but not least, Mongolian. The latter, however, he had only taken up for a few months, and was compelled to admit that the mastering of it was hardly worth the candle.

"We will go for a walk after breakfast," said our host. "But I must first introduce you to the lions of Kiakhta, after which we will see about the tarantass." Breakfast over, we set out with our friend for a ramble round the place.

The professor was, like all Germans, no friend of Russia. "What are they but pigs, these Siberians?" said he, as we walked down to Kiakhta. "The men are all thieves, do nothing all day but smoke, drink, and play cards. As for the women, you can easily imagine what becomes of them under such circumstances. There is no rational amusement of any kind here, no sport among the men, no music or dancing among the women, nothing but vodka, vodka, vodka, cards, cards, cards, all day long. Ah! *mon cher, n'en parlons plus. Çe sont des*

canailles!" I then thought our friend was a little hard upon the good people of Kiakhta, but had good cause, afterwards, to alter my opinion.

The cathedral, which was entirely built by tea-merchants, is a beautiful building of Byzantine architecture. The cost is said to have been 150,000*l.* sterling, and after seeing the gorgeous decorations of the interior, one had no difficulty in believing this. The altar alone, of solid gold, silver, and platinum, cost 30,000*l.*, while the principal doors of the building are of solid silver, and weigh 200 lbs. A huge candlestick and chandelier studded with emeralds, rubies, and diamonds, and several beautifully executed oil paintings from Europe, together with some Ikons or sacred pictures, thickly encrusted with precious stones, completed the decoration of the interior of the building, which though, like most Russian churches, of a florid style, was exceedingly beautiful. A peal of eight bells, made in Moscow, and of great weight, must have added not a little to the general cost, for they had to be dragged two thousand miles through the deep, muddy roads of Siberia. There are two smaller churches in Kiakhta besides a large

cemetery, lying between that town and Troitzkosavsk.

"They are perfect Rothschilds in their way," said the professor, as walking home I noticed what palatial buildings some of the tea-merchants and gold-miners had erected, "but with no more manners than their own bullocks—in fact they are a class of themselves, and Siberia is the very best place for them. No one would stand them in Europe."

There are, the professor told us, about fifteen of these men living in Kiakhta, one of them worth at least a million sterling. Walking back to Troitzkosavsk that day, we passed a huge building on the roadside, erected by M. Nempshinof—the millionaire in question—for a mausoleum for himself, at a cost of 40,000*l.* sterling. But all this is done more for vanity than anything else. Their donations to the poor, their gifts to the church, their building of churches, is not charity so much as a desire to show that they can spend more money than their neighbour. In Kiakhta, Herr R—— told us, their daily life consists in rising about mid-day, winter and summer, going down, if in the tea-season, to inspect

the tea-bags and chests which sometimes burst or break in transit across Gobi, after which they visit each other's houses and settle down to cards and champagne (at Rs. 13 [1*l.* 10*s.*] a bottle), with short intervals for refreshment, till four or five the next morning, when, helplessly drunk, they reel home to bed, or rather to a chair or sofa, for there are no beds in Kiakhta, even in the best regulated families. The favourite game in Kiakhta is nap, at which these men gamble for tremendously high sums, sometimes playing 1000*l.* a trick. Intellectual amusements they have none, indeed the majority cannot even read! But I shall have more to say of these strange creatures anon, and must now give the reader a full and graphic account of an evening party *à la Sibérienne!*

"M. Wormoff, my colleague, has deputed me to invite you to dine this evening," said the professor, as we were about to bid him good evening. "Will you come? Do not let me persuade you against your will, but I think you will be amused at our, or let me rather say their, manners and customs."

We gladly accepted, and presented ourselves at

M. Wormoff's residence at nine o'clock, the hour mentioned. Rather late, we thought, but no doubt the Siberian custom, though having tasted no food since breakfast, Glemboûski having (as usual) nothing in the house, we would willingly have dined an hour or two earlier.

The guests were already assembled when we arrived, including our German friend, who introduced us to all present; Professor Wormoff, his newly married wife, a pretty little woman from Tomsk, Captain Cherkoff, of the Cossacks, who evidently thought Madame Wormoff a pleasant addition to Kiakhta society, a Russian professor of music, of mathematics, and chemistry (the last a German), the post-master, and ourselves. Of these Cherkoff and the chemist spoke French, the others not a word of anything but Russian.

Wormoff had a charming house, and evidences of his wife's good taste could be everywhere seen in the drawing-room, into which we were shown. Introductions over, everybody sat solemnly down without a word, and Madame Wormoff left the room. I confess I hoped she had gone to see about dinner, but half-past eight, nine, half-past nine came, and no

signs of moving. About this time Cherkoff offered me a cigarette, which, more to stave off the pangs of hunger than anything else, I accepted and lit. There was a magnificent grand piano (by Erard) in the room, upon which I was asked to perform, and played, with as much spirit as I could muster, the Russian Hymn and other patriotic tunes, but they fell flat, and no wonder. Everybody appeared to me to be getting gradually paler and paler with hunger, nor could I, with any propriety, get anywhere near R——, who was sitting next our host, to ask him if we were ever going to have anything to eat.

At last, about 11.30, the door opened, and a servant entered, bearing a tray with two large bottles of vodka. This, I thought, looked like a preliminary to food, at any rate the spirit kept faintness off! A quarter of an hour later Madame Wormoff returned to announce that dinner (dinner at 11.30!!) was ready, and we adjourned gravely to an upstairs apartment, where the repast awaited us. In a corner of the room stood a small table set out with smoked herrings, salmon, cheese, caviar, and flanked by half a dozen huge bottles of vodka, cognac, curaçao, kümmel, and other liqueurs.

Here every one took a morsel of cheese or fish in his fingers, and gravely drank our health one by one, turning their glass up, if we did not drain ours to the dregs, to show that it was empty. By the time supper was served my head began to swim, for I had had to imbibe in this way, and on an empty stomach, seven or eight glasses of vodka, a liquid to which I was totally unaccustomed, and which is, I need not say, extremely potent.

One diminutive chicken and half a dozen small cutlets do not go far among half a dozen hungry men, but that was literally the only food there was. There was plenty to drink; but what drink! Brandy, vodka, and white port (English made). Beer, claret, or sherry, there were none, or even water, for after devouring salt fish like so many Esquimaux, one would gladly have put up with the latter, had there been any.

Madame Wormoff retired to rest shortly after midnight. Strangely enough, we missed our friend the Cossack at the very same moment. Such a proceeding would have seemed somewhat strange anywhere else, especially as the gallant Captain returned in half an hour, after a prolonged tête-à-tête with Madame, and joined us again.

But nobody, even Wormoff, seemed in the least surprised.

The lady's departure was the signal for real hard drinking to commence, though, indeed, our companions had lost no time before she left. In vain I protested that I never drank port, that strong liquor disagreed with me; my hosts either would not or could not understand, and insisted on my drinking with them separately and in turn. "Do not refuse, or they will pick a quarrel with you," whispered R——; and not wishing to be mixed up in a mêlée with these giants, not one of whom was under six feet high, I made a virtue of necessity. It reminded me of the scene between the celebrated Mr. Jorrocks and his huntsman, who, when they had exhausted all other toasts, drank the healths of all the hounds separately. When our friends had exhausted the Czar, the army, the navy, the Queen of England, and all reigning potentates, including the Emperor of China, they fell back on themselves. I must have drunk at least three bottles of port that night, to say nothing of vodka, and by the time we left the table to adjourn to the piano and wind up the evening, or rather morning

with song, my throat was like a lime-kiln, and my head spinning like a teetotum.

All at the table were the worse for liquor; but the scholastic representatives of mathematics and chemistry were, to say the least of it, very drunk indeed. I was the innocent cause of a severe and sanguinary combat between them. Earlier in the evening, our conversation having turned upon duelling, I had related to the Cossack captain, much to his amusement, the story of the three-cornered duel in "Mr. Midshipman Easy," which is probably familiar to the reader. The mathematical professor insisted on the joke being translated to him by the professor of chemistry, which, with no little difficulty, the latter did, but it instantly led to a wrangle. No three men, said the mathematician, could fire at each other. The thing was absurd, unfair, preposterous; one of them must be at a disadvantage. The discussion became so heated at last that Wormoff had to put a stop to it, thinking every instant the pair would come to blows, and peace was, for a time, restored.

We then adjourned to the drawing-room, where all sang and shouted at the top of their voices, regardless of time or tune, till past 4 a.m. If poor Madame Wormoff slept anywhere near, she must have had a bad time of it. Suddenly, while at the piano, a low, choking sound attracted my attention, and I looked underneath to find Russia (represented by the mathematician), lying on the top of Germany (represented by the chemist), and slowly but surely throttling her. The thing had been done so gently that neither Lancaster nor myself had noticed it. The others had returned to the dining-room and vodka. Quickly summoning Wormoff, we managed to get them apart, but not without difficulty. The Russian had decidedly the best of the combat, for the chemist was half dead, his face purple, and eyes protruding. It took at least half a bottle of vodka to bring him round again, and enable him to inform us that the *casus belli* was still the triangular duel! The Cossack was all for blood, and wanted them to fight it out with pistols in the morning. Nothing, he said, would settle the question but practical demonstration, and he would be charmed to make a third, but this was fortunately averted.

It was broad daylight when we separated, English bottled stout being handed round as a finale to the entertainment. It costs about a guinea a bottle in Kiakhta, and we drank it out of small wine-glasses. Then every one kissed every one else (this we found one of the most trying ordeals in Siberia), and we separated, having accepted an invitation to dine next evening with the post-master, but dearly hoping by that time to have left Kiakhta, little knowing that he alone had the power to grant us a Podarojna and horses to take us to Irkoutsk. Cherkoff insisted on seeing us home to the door of the hotel, where, after affectionately kissing me on the forehead, he left us, and tacked up the street, his sword rattling between his legs, to morning parade at 5.30. So ended our first evening party in Siberia!

We bought a tarantass next morning, and were lucky enough to get a very good one, though it had just done a long journey, and necessitated a delay of a couple of days to have the wheels, axles, &c., thoroughly overhauled before setting out on the two thousand miles of rough and trying road that lay between us and Tomsk. There was little trouble about stores. A small box of tea, a bag containing

sugar, two or three loaves of white bread, and half a dozen lemons are all the Siberian travels with, and we resolved to do the same, indeed there would have been no room for more, for the tarantass was already full to overflowing with our portmanteaus and gun-cases. It may here be as well to give the reader a brief description of the vehicle, which in summer replaces the sleigh in Siberia, and which is admirably adapted for long journeys and rough roads.

A tarantass resembles a large cradle on four wheels. The body of our vehicle was about seven feet in length by five feet broad, and the bottom being concave, gave us plenty of room wherein to pack our portmanteaus and other luggage impedimenta. There are neither seats or springs, the occupants lying at full length on a mattress placed over the luggage or bottom of the carriage. A hood, capable of being folded back, covers the occupant partially, and from this hood to the driver's seat in front can be spread an apron to serve as a further protection. The body of the tarantass rests on poles, and these rest in turn on the axletrees and wheels. The poles are generally springy, and much longer than the body of

the vehicle, the fore and hind wheels are placed as far apart as the length of the poles will allow, and the body is placed mid-way between the wheels, so the want of proper springs is partially compensated for, inasmuch as the occupant does not feel the force of the jolting as he would do if he were seated directly over the wheels. Such is a brief description of the vehicle in which we travelled a distance of considerably over a thousand miles, from Kiakhta to Tomsk. The price we paid for ours was 280 roubles, which, considering all things and the distance we were from civilization, was not out of the way.

The next thing was to get rid of our ponies, Chow and Kharra. I knew the kind of life they would lead had we sold them to our Kiakhta friends, so we gave them away to a party of Mongols setting out for the desert. Poor little Kharra! He has, at any rate, a better time of it on his native breezy steppes, than in the streets of hot, dusty Pekin. Nearly the whole day was spent in preparations for departure; packing the tarantass, obtaining our Podarojna, and so forth. For the latter we had to apply to our friend of the evening before, the post-

master, who was most reluctant to give us the document, and begged us to make a longer stay in Kiakhta. Seeing we were determined, however, he gave it us at last, reminding us that dinner would be on the table at *ten o'clock* sharp that evening.

The market at Troitzkosavsk is an interesting sight. It is a square open building, the shops around belonging partly to Chinese and partly to Europeans, and the medley of eastern and western population was most curious. The Russian shops were principally for the sale of stores, tobacco, provisions of all kinds, and ironmongery, but those of the Chinese devoted exclusively to tea and silks, in both of which there is an enormous trade in Kiakhta. Adjoining this was the fish-market, where sturdy Siberian fishwives appeared to be doing a roaring trade in salted salmon, trout. "Omul," carp, and other fish from Lake Baikal. Fresh fish is seldom obtainable at Kiakhta, the Little Bura river which flows through being nothing more than a dry ditch in summer, and frozen over in winter. Having occasion to send a telegram, I went to the office on my way home, and was sur-

prised at the absurdly low tariff, one rouble, or rather under one and eightpence for ten words to Petersburg, and all other parts of the Russian empire from the Baltic to the Sea of Okhotzk.

We were to start for Lake Baïkal at nine next morning—at least horses had been promised us for that hour, yet when we arrived at the post-master's with R——, it was getting on for 10.30, there were no signs of dinner. The party was in point of fact nothing more nor less than a repetition of the night before, with the addition of about a dozen male and half a dozen female guests. We saw, with a shudder, that the postmaster had resolved to make a night of it, and our hopes of getting away anything like early on the morrow vanished into thin air.

The company was rather more orderly, however, at first, and we had, for a wonder, something to eat. Among the ladies was a young "Bouriatte" lady, who had just returned from a finishing school in Irkoutsk. The Bouriattes are an aboriginal tribe inhabiting the country north and east of Irkoutsk, and were but a short time since very little removed from the Mongols in point of civilization. This

young lady had the queer physiognomy peculiar to her race, the flat nose, high cheek bones, thick lips, and narrow, twinkling eyes, which made a strange contrast to a European gown of the latest fashion that she wore. Still more curious was it when she sat down at the grand piano and gave us Mendelssohn's "Lieder," and one of Liszt's "Rhapsodies" with an execution and feeling that I have seldom heard surpassed by an amateur. Classical music was evidently not appreciated in Kiakhta, and the bright jingling music of the "Cloches de Corneville" and "Le petit Duc" were much more enthusiastically received when Madame B——, a pretty little woman, the wife of the military doctor, sat down to the instrument and rattled them off.

Our friend, Captain Cherkoff, came in rather late, having been out with his men at target practice by moonlight—the order for this practice had only just been promulgated from Petersburg, and it really seems a very sensible proceeding. Three times a week, wet or dry, the troops were exercised at this manœuvre from ten o'clock till midnight.

The first part of the evening was pleasant enough, though the manners of some of the guests were, to

say the least of it, curious. Many had never been fifty miles from Kiakhta in their lives, so were to be pardoned, though it did not make their behaviour any the less unpleasant to their neighbours. The women, poor things, noticed this, and kept apologizing for the behaviour of their male relatives. We took leave of them at about two o'clock, on the plea that we should have to be leaving early. I noticed at the time a covert smile pass over the face of the post-master, but attributed no importance to it, and sought my hard couch with a feeling of relief that to-morrow would see us fairly off for Irkoutsk.

The horses were to be in by nine, we were told, but we waited till eleven o'clock, without a sign of their arrival. Losing all patience, I walked up to the post-master's, and found him still sleeping off the effects of the night's debauch on two chairs. I knew that the slightest show of temper would only have made matters worse, so waking him as gently as I could, asked politely why the horses had not arrived. For some minutes his fuddled brains could not grasp my meaning, till a sudden light burst on him: "Ah, to be sure, the horses. Alas! my friend, there are none for you: besides,

you cannot go to-day. After you had left, our mutual friend Cherkoff commissioned me to ask you to breakfast with him at the barracks, and I took upon myself to accept for you, and gave your 'Troika' to some one else. There is no hurry. You shall go to-night. In the meantime I will dress, and we will go up to the barracks together. It is already past twelve."

I could have shaken the little wretch with vexation. While he was dressing, however (an operation that consisted of putting on his boots and coat), I came to the conclusion that it was better to appear pleased, a Russian post-master being as omnipotent in his small way as the veriest African tyrant. I was beginning to think that Siberian travel is not unlike African. The difficulty is not so much getting *to* a place as getting away from it!

The barracks contained two or three hundred men, a company of Cossacks under the command of Cherkoff, who, like all captains of the Russian army, had obtained his brevet colonelcy on crossing the Ourals into Siberia. The garrison of Kiakhta is over eight hundred strong, but this is mostly

made up of militia. Several of the men were standing about the barrack-yard as we entered, broad, swarthy, sunburnt fellows in white linen uniforms, who looked fit to go through anything, but had not a trace of smartness about them.

On arrival at the barracks we were ushered into a large, bare, whitewashed room crowded with people, who had apparently just risen from a table covered with the usual salt fish and other thirst-producing comestibles. One could hardly see across the room for cigarette-smoke. Nor did it take us long to discover that most of the party, some twenty in number, had already breakfasted not wisely but too well. All our old friends were there. The ladies (in low dresses) had wisely retired into an inner apartment, where they sat alone. "You are late," said Professor R——, "but will not miss anything, unless you care for salt fish. This is a true Siberian breakfast," he added, with a smile at our astonishment.

Never shall I forget that afternoon. The place reeked with the fumes of tobacco and spirits, mingled with a sickening smell of fish. Though barely three o'clock in the afternoon, half the

men were intoxicated, alternately singing, fighting, and drinking. Cherkoff, I am bound to say, looked ashamed of his guests, as well he might. The bright sun streaming in on their drink-heated faces and disordered dress was not a pretty spectacle. Little Madame B——, a native of Moscow, confided to me, with tears in her eyes, what a dog's life it was for a woman. I sincerely pitied her. It seemed hard that one of her refined taste and ideas should be condemned to live in such a human Zoological Garden.

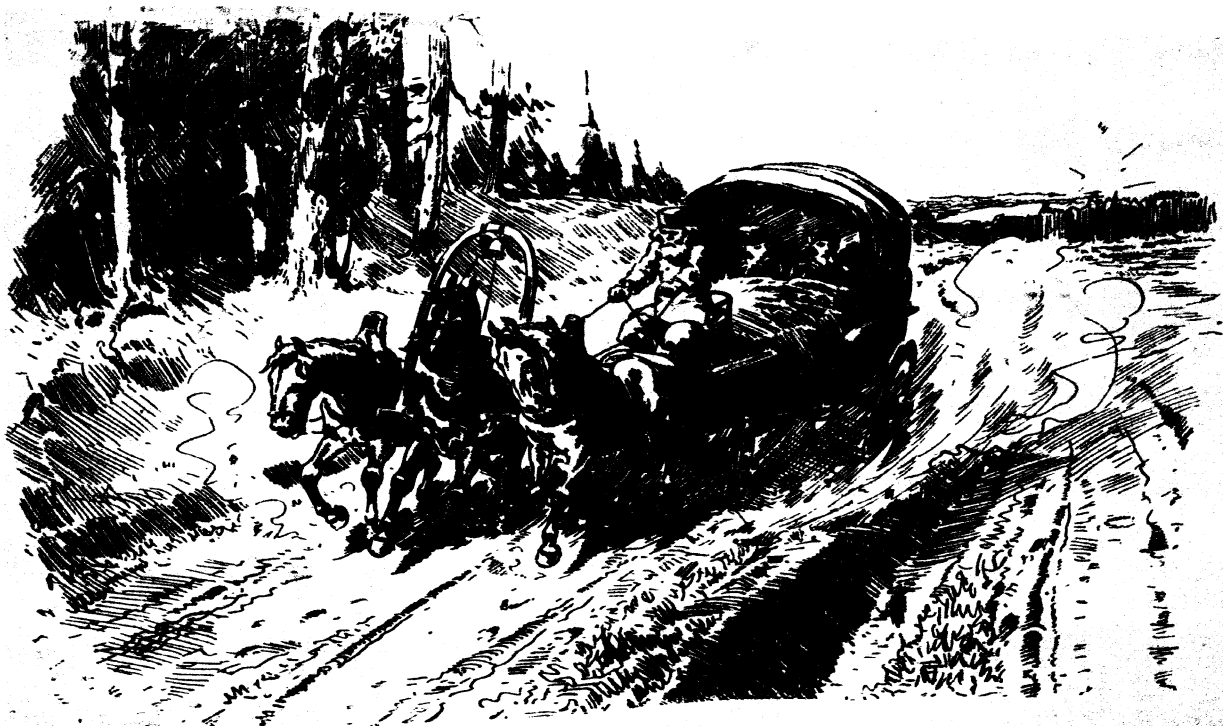
The tarantass arrived about four o'clock, much to our relief, and we commenced to take leave of our hosts. I say commenced, for the operation lasted quite three-quarters of an hour, we having to drink a glass of vodka separately with each man.

This ordeal over, we descended on either side of Cherkoff, the entire party following, to the barrack-square, where the whole company of Cossacks was drawn up in line. Upon our appearance all struck up a hymn which, upon any other occasion, I could have listened to with pleasure, but which, now that I felt it made another hour of delay,

bored me beyond measure. The song finished, a sergeant approached us, bearing in each hand a huge tumbler of vodka. "One of you must drink it off," whispered our guide, philosopher, and friend, Herr R——. "This is considered a great honour." Handing me one glass, the captain took another, and facing me in front of his men, cried out, "À la Reine d'Angleterre!" to which I replied, "À l'Empereur de Russie!" tossing off at the same time the whole of the vodka at a gulp. It was like liquid fire! but I was not allowed much time for thought, for in a second, at a sign from Cherkoff, the Cossacks had seized Lancaster and myself, and sent us whirling ten feet into the air, catching us again in their hands and arms as we alighted. Once, twice, three times I was sent up; and then, giddy and out of breath, we returned to the balcony. By this time, what with the shouting, the tossing, and the vodka, I hardly knew whether I was on my head or my heels! A dance among the men followed this performance, a dance favourite with the Cossacks, accompanied on a kind of tom-tom, with much shouting and clapping of hands. Having watched this for a few moments we first quietly took leave

of R., then bidding good-bye to Cherkoff (whom we left dancing with his men), we jumped into the carriage while the remainder of the guests were looking the other way. But they were too quick for us, for just as we were moving off, two of them caught sight of the tarantass, and, dashing through the crowd, leapt in, to accompany us, Siberian fashion, to the outskirts of the town. One of them had concealed a bottle of vodka, which he produced when we reached the town-gates, and insisted on our drinking with him and his friend. But we were firm, and they very drunk, so we soon managed to give them the slip. They were sitting in the road, the last we saw of them, embracing each other, the empty vodka bottle beside them.

It was growing dusk as we left Kiakhta; but the cool night-air, rapid motion, and exhilarating jingle of the bells as the three sturdy little horses tore along the hard, level road, soon cleared the cobwebs from our brain, and made one forget the scenes of debauch of the past three days. The entertainments we had attended left the same impression on my mind as a head-feast I once witnessed in Central Borneo—a kind of wonder that human beings, however uncivilized,



could become so animal, not to say bestial, in their minds and habits. I have not exaggerated the state of things at Kiakhta, though must, in justice, add that it was the most dissolute and drunken place we came across. Some excuse, too, must be made for people living in a land with such squalid, depressing surroundings, and having absolutely no intellectual pursuits.

There are two roads from Kiakhta to Lake Baikal; one the old post-road, the other a private one, made and used by the tea-merchants, or by those having their permission. The latter is a hundred and eighty versts shorter than the old government post-road. By the intervention of Herr R., we were permitted to use the private road, and luckily, for we had but three days before us to catch the steamboat at Moushafskaya, on the eastern shore of the lake. We reached the first stage, twenty versts from Kiakhta, just before midnight. Here we first began to taste the delights of Siberian posting, for there were no horses, nor would there be till next morning. The post-house was, however, bran new, and as clean as a new pin inside and out; and we were not sorry for the rest afforded by the delay. Had all the post-houses in Siberia been as clean and

comfortable as those in the Trans-Baikal, we should have had little to complain of. But the Russian government has a very different way of doing things to its wealthy and luxurious purveyors of tea.

We were away again shortly after seven o'clock, but began the day badly. Of our "Troika,"[1] two were bolters and one a jibber; and a slight difference of opinion at the start ended by the bolting of the two outside horses, who dragged the jibber along with them by main force. They tore along at a mad gallop for a couple of hundred yards, the heavy tarantass swaying to and fro, till a friendly sand-bank brought us up all standing, the off-wheel buried in the earth, the near one whirling round in the air. As for the yemstchik, he had disappeared, and presently emerged like a water-god, dripping with water, and covered with duck-weed, for he had been shot into a pond the other side of the bank. We got righted with the aid of some peasants, and by dint of lashing, yelling, and cursing, got the unruly team off again at a gallop; and though for a mile or so we were as often off the road as on it, we

[1] Russian for a team of three horses.

met with no further misadventure, for a time, at least. "Pour une personne qui n'aime pas les émotions," as the French say, posting in Siberia is rather a strain on the nerves. The yemstchik has no idea of danger, will drive at full gallop down a hill like the side of a house, though it may be half a mile long, and there is nothing to stop you at the bottom but a river or precipice without a guard-rail, or standing up on the box and lashing the horses into a furious gallop in places where a broken rein or the falling of one horse would send the whole concern to kingdom come—yourself included. And yet it is surprising how few serious accidents do occur on the great post-road. Yemstchiks seem, like drunken men, to be under the special care of Providence.

We reached the Selenga river about mid-day, a deep, swift stream about half a mile broad, and crossed by a ferry. This was our first experience of a Siberian ferry, but we were not allowed to examine it long, for turning on to the wooden landing-stage, our yemstchik shaved the side so close that the bank gave way, and the off-side of the tarantass fell bodily over almost into the stream. Luckily,

one of the posts of the bridge caught the axle of the wheel, and we jumped out quick as lightning, only to see that our vehicle was hanging, saved only by a thread from utter destruction. Had not the post been of the strongest pine, it must have given way. The yemstchik stood by whimpering, evidently expecting what he would have had if his passengers had been Russians, a sound thrashing, and I felt sorely inclined to give it him, except that it would have lost time, and every moment the strain on our sole hope, the wooden post, was getting more severe. It took us some time to get the horses out, for they were plunging and kicking so that I expected every moment to see them dislodge the heavy, cumbersome carriage, and send it plunging into the river. There was but one thing to do, cut the traces, and as soon as this was done Lancaster and I set to work and got all the luggage out to lighten it as much as possible. The yemstchik, delighted to find his skin whole, worked away like a Trojan, and with the aid of some men from the ferry, we managed to get two or three planks from the stage. These we placed under the carriage, and I breathed again. Our tarantass was

saved. But though all actual danger of losing it was over, it was by no means an easy task to hoist it on *terra firma*. There were but two peasants in charge of the ferry—a very old man and a very small boy, and our united efforts never made it budge an inch. There was nothing left but to send for help to a village about three miles off, and patiently sit down and wait with the pleasing conviction that we had for a certainty lost the steamer at Shamoufskaya.

It was not till nearly four o'clock that the men arrived, and past five before we had got the things in again, rigged up some traces, a simple job enough in Siberia, where they are made of rope, and got our carriage safely hoisted on to the ferry. We then crossed safely, and proceeded on our journey.

The ferry across the Selenga is constructed on the same plan as over every other Siberian river we crossed. A large barge is moored mid-stream about two hundred yards above the ferry. To this is attached a stout chain, connected by means of a number of smaller boats, to the bows of the ferry. On being cast off from the shore, the mere force of

the stream is sufficient to propel the ferry from bank to bank. This seemed a simple and effectual plan, particularly in Siberia, where the rivers are mostly of great size and swiftness.

The scenery from here to Monshafskaya was lovely, and perhaps the more civilized nature of the landscape made one appreciate it more from just leaving the bare, monotonous steppes of Mongolia. It seemed almost as if one were home again, to see the large enclosed meadows, the ruddy peasantry in the hay-fields, and the pretty, rustic-looking villages, with their gabled cottages, and picturesque church towers. The bright warm sun lent an air of gaiety to the scene, and everything looked happy and contented, from the rosy-cheeked peasant girls with their hay-rakes and milk-pails, to the fat sleepy cattle browsing in the fields.

There were no horses to be had till midnight at the next stopping-place, so we made ourselves comfortable and got the post-master's wife to give us some supper, a delicious meal of black bread, eggs, and thick clotted cream, with some berries of her own preserving. All was excellent but the black bread, a substance

not unlike suet mixed with soot and treacle. The postmistress herself brought us supper, but her lord and master was terribly jealous, and never let her out of his sight for a moment, a circumstance that seemed to afford her the greatest amusement. She was a true Russian from Nijni Novgorod, she told us, and not a Siberian. Her name was Olga, and she'd just had a baby, and would, I believe, have told us the whole particulars of its birth, had not Benedick, who scowled in a corner the whole time, sent her off to bed. We carried on the conversation by means of a dialogue book, and she laughed till she cried at my attempts at Russian. The walls of the post-house were covered with pictures cut from illustrated papers. Among others one of Mrs. Langtry out of the *Graphic*. "Krasivia Dama Ingliska,"[2] said pretty Olga, as she pointed it out. I have often wondered how it ever drifted to this outlandish place, and if Mrs Langtry is aware that her fair fame has spread as far as the Russo-Chinese frontier.

The country became more mountainous after this

[2] A pretty English lady.

and less cultivated, though one passed every now and again fertile valleys well stocked with rye, corn, and barley, and prosperous-looking, fair-sized villages nestling in the hills. The roads were excellent, far better than any others we met with throughout Siberia. Their comparative newness, and the small amount of traffic that goes this way compared to the other, no doubt accounts for this. We were fairly lucky too in obtaining horses, and were only detained twice, once on the occasion I have mentioned, and the other the night before we reached Monshafskaya on the Baikal at Abukansk. As, however, we made the acquaintance of a charming fellow-traveller on the second occasion, who was in the same plight as ourselves, we did not mind the delay. Had it not been for this chance friend, we should have been quite ten days reaching Irkoutsk instead of five. M. Radovitch was a Russian in Government employ, on his way to Irkoutsk. He had already been at Abukansk some hours when we got there, and when we entered the post-house addressed us in excellent French, much to our delight. We spent quite a pleasant evening, for the post-house was clean and comfortable, and next morning at 4 a.m., the horses being ready,

started off together for Monschafskaya, Rudovitch in a téléga or public travelling-carriage, a vehicle built on the same lines as a tarantass, but having the great disadvantage, that the traveller must change into another at every station.

The approach to Lake Baikal lies through a valley or gorge with steep rocky mountains, pine-clad almost to their summits, on either side. So narrow is the road in parts that there is barely room for two vehicles abreast, while a precipitous torrent about fifty feet below dashes along amid huge rocks and boulders to fall into the lake just below Monshafskaya. A great part of the road is cut out of the solid rock and must have cost a fabulous sum to make. We arrived at this, the most difficult and dangerous part of the road, just before sunset. It was rather nervous work, for there was no guard-rail or attempt at protection, and the slightest shy or false step of the horses, who were not of the steadiest, would have precipitated one on to the rocks below. Presently we left the ravine to ascend a steep hill, so steep indeed that four horses could hardly get us along. Luckily it was barely a quarter of a mile to the summit. Resting here awhile for our tired horses to regain breath, we heard a sound as of waves beating on a

rocky shore. Walking on a few yards, we came to the edge of a cliff. The thick undergrowth and dense forest had up till now hidden it from view, for suddenly there at our feet, the snow-clad summits of its coasts glowing in the sunset, a sea of sapphire flecked with white waves, lay fathomless Lake Baikal.

We skirted the lake for some time, now on a level with the shingly beach, now hundreds of feet above it, before we got to Monshafskaya, at dusk. The steamer, to our great relief, was a day late, and would not be leaving for Listvenitz (the port for Irkoutsk) till the following day at noon. The rest-house was crowded with travellers, one a special Government courier from Nicolaiefsk, whom Radovitch knew and introduced us to: a pleasant, chatty fellow, who had once held a commission in a crack calvary regiment, but having lived not wisely but too well, had sold out and joined the Courier Service. On the occasion of the late Czar's assassination he was sent (in winter) from Irkoutsk to Nicolaiefsk (on the sea of Okhotzk) and performed the journey in twelve days, an unprecedented feat, though on arrival at Nicolaiefsk he was lifted out of his sleigh more

dead than alive, and did not recover for some months.

Monshafskaya is but a small village consisting of the rest-house, half a dozen cottages, and the "Ostrog" or prison. A sentry, with loaded rifle, stood at the gate, and eyed us rather suspiciously when we approached to look closer at the faces that, pressed against the iron bars of the small square windows, were watching our every movement. Most of them were, Radovitch told us, on their way to the gold-mines of Nertchinsk, and were of the lowest order of criminals, the sweepings of Moscow and St. Petersburg. More villainous faces I have seldom seen. The four large windows of the cells reserved for political prisoners showed us but one, a young and good-looking man, who when we looked at him, instantly averted his gaze. "He is for Karra," said the sentry, with a leer, to Radovitch. "Won't he enjoy himself?" None but Black Nihilists, of which he was one, and murderers are sent to this hell upon earth, which is, except Sakhalien, the most dreaded prison in Siberia. The unhappy wretches exiled to Siberia for political offences, are undoubtedly far worse off than the

criminals sent there for theft or murder. Pens, ink, and paper, to say nothing of books, are rigorously forbidden, and this is the cruellest punishment for men of intellect who, taken from a life of mental activity in civilized Europe, are thrust perhaps for life into a prison with absolutely nothing, not even physical work to divert their thoughts from their shame and misery. As for the criminal classes, they care little so long as they get their vodka smuggled in, in the entrails of a pig or sheep, or can bribe or cajole their guards out of a screw of tobacco. Siberia may truly be called the criminal's heaven and the Nihilist's hell. Once past the Oural mountains, every liberty, every indulgence, is accorded to the former to induce them to colonize and become respectable citizens; for the latter there is nothing but insult, harsh treatment, and injustice.

Monshafskaya is surrounded by dense pine forest, through which runs the great post-road fringed by high banks, on which were hedges of hops and wild raspberries in full bearing. The fruit was quite equal in flavour to the real thing, though much smaller. The soil round here seemed wonderfully adapted for fruit-growing. Raspberries, currants, strawberries, and gooseberries

grew luxuriantly in all the cottage gardens, and the natives preserve them largely for sale at Irkoutsk and other towns of Eastern Siberia. The place has rather a depressing appearance, nevertheless, the houses of unpainted wood giving a sombre look at first sight, for the only spot of colour against the dark forest was the rest-house, with its white walls and bright green roof. Turning seaward, or rather lakeward, however, the view was very different. It was a clear, though rather cold day, with a strong north-wester blowing, just sufficiently strong to cover the bright blue waters with curling white waves, and show one that if the wind rose any higher things might be unpleasant before we reached Listvenitz, for Radovitch gave us lamentable accounts of the steamer. It was just like being at the seaside in England. One almost fancied one smelt the ozone, while the sound of the waves, beating on the beach, heightened the illusion. The opposite coast was quite invisible, clear day though it was, while to the left and right of us extended broad stretches of shingly beach alternating with patches of bright golden sand standing out bright and distinct against the dark green pines growing down to the water's edge.

To complete the resemblance, a wooden jetty, with a lighthouse at the end, ran out for a distance of fifty yards into the lake, forming a small harbour in which lay moored a number of small fishing-boats and two large black hulks, prison barges, waiting to be towed back to Listvenitz for a fresh convoy. Such was the scene from our rest-house on the hill. Has the reader ever seen the village of Clovelly, in Devonshire? If so, let him substitute pines for oak and beech-trees, unpaved paths for cobbled streets, wooden huts for stone houses, and he has seen Monshafskaya as I saw it that bright August morning, when for the first time I looked on the waters of the Holy Sea of Siberia, for by this name alone is Lake Baikal known by the natives inhabiting its shores. To call it a lake to a Siberian is an insult. He will invariably correct you with the rebuke, "I suppose you mean our Sea." Among the peasantry it is believed to bring dire misfortune on any one daring to call it by any other name. Lake Baikal was first discovered by one Ivanoff, who, travelling downwards from Yakoutsk, was prospecting for silver. Like Magellan, "He was the first that ever burst into that silent sea," about

the year 1600. The first caravan crossed the lake from China to Europe A.D. 1670.

Lake Baikal is three hundred and fifty miles long by about forty at the lowest point, and is the largest fresh-water lake in Asia, or indeed the whole world, America excepted. The most peculiar characteristic about Baikal is its enormous depth. Soundings have been taken in parts of four thousand feet in the centre, in other parts lines of five thousand and six thousand feet have been used, but no bottom found, and some of the smaller rivers running into the lake, streams of fifty or sixty yards broad, have been found to be over one hundred and fifty fathoms deep. There are many rivers running into the Baikal, but only one that runs out, the "Angara," which, eventually joining the Yenisei river, flows into the gulf of that name in the Arctic Ocean, thus traversing nearly half the breadth of Asia. The current of this immense body of water is so impetuous that although the distance is only thirty miles, vessels sometimes take four and even five days to do the distance from Irkoutsk to Lake Baikal, which is sixty feet higher above sea-level than the capital of Eastern Siberia, the lake being twelve hundred feet above the level of the sea. Baikal is occasionally

visited by terrible hurricanes. On such occasions the loss of life is great, for the ramshackle boats in which the natives fish soon go to pieces in a sea. The Garra or mountain wind is the one most dreaded by the natives, and when this is blowing even the steamers do not put out. Lake Baikal that derives its name of Holy Sea, from the fact our Saviour, when visiting this part of Asia, is supposed to have mounted to the summit of Olkon, an island about sixty miles long by fifteen broad, in the middle of the lake, and surveyed the surrounding countries. Having blessed the land on the north and west, He turned to the south-west, and, stretching out His hands, cried, "*Beyond this shall be desolation.*" On this account, say the natives, the "Dauria" region is so sterile that not a grain of corn will grow there.

I think I am right in saying that Baikal is the only fresh-water lake in the world wherein seals are found. About two thousand are killed annually and sent to Irkoutsk for sale. Bell, the English traveller, 1788 (the first Englishman, by the way, who ever got as far east as this), mentions this circumstance, and says, "Bay-Kal (*sic*), is furnished with excellent fish, particularly

sturgeon. It also produces great numbers of seals, whose skins are preferred in quality to those caught in salt water. I am of opinion that both the seals in Bay Kall came originally from the Northern Ocean, as the communication between them is open, though the distance be very great." The above, though written in 1788, is perhaps the most likely explanation of the matter.

Atkinson, the English traveller, is the only European who has ever thoroughly explored Baikal. He made, forty years since, a most interesting journey from its northern to its southern extremity in an open boat, a hazardous experiment, for Baikal is a miniature Mediterranean in the way of sudden and violent squalls. Atkinson found the shores surrounding the lake at the southern end to be chiefly granite cliffs capped by dense forests. Proceeding due north, the granite changes to an imperfect conglomeration of stone, the beach being composed of mixed *débris*. The northern shore is the steepest, and its precipices nine hundred to twelve hundred feet high, with soundings of one hundred and fifty fathoms a boat's length from their base. "The whole country round," says the same traveller, "shows unmistakable signs of

volcanic eruption, and in the ravines are lava strata of great magnitude. This is probably the outcome of an extinct crater to the north of the Baikal chain in whose neighbourhood hot mineral springs are plentiful.

M. Menshikoff, an Irkoutsk tea-merchant, was the first to introduce steamers on Lake Baikal. The passage, as it was made forty years ago, in open boats, was very dangerous, and travellers were frequently obliged to remain for days exposed to great hardships, without being able to approach the land. The cost of the steamer was of course enormous, the engines having to come over four thousand miles from St. Petersburg. But the difficulty was at length surmounted, and rather more than twenty years ago bi-weekly steam communication between the eastern and western shores of the lake was established, which has been kept up ever since. There were, at the time of our visit, two steamers on the lake, and another building at Listvenitz. The navigation of the Baikal is suspended about the end of October, sometimes earlier, according to the severity of the season. Although there has been a road within late years round the southern side of the lake, it is rarely used, and the usual mode

of crossing in winter is by sleigh. The ice is over seven feet thick, so there is no danger of immersion, although I must confess I should not care to do the journey myself. In mid-winter, when the ice is in good condition, the distance of thirty miles across is frequently done in two to three hours, but in the spring, huge cracks appear in the track, which impede the horses a good deal. There were also formerly rest-stations at intervals of every seven or eight miles, but on one occasion, the ice melting suddenly, one of them was found missing, since which the traveller embarks upon the frozen waters with no prospect of rest or refresment till he gets to the other side.

The steamer hove in sight about mid-day with a large convict barge in tow. By two o'clock she was alongside the jetty, and we walked down to see the prisoners land. Thirty or forty Cossacks, with loaded rifles, stood in a double row at the gangway, and as soon as the huge, unwieldy barge was safely moored, some three hundred convicts stepped on to the landing-stage. All wore the prison dress, a long loose grey cloak covering a coarse drab suit, and many wore leg-irons. There

were no political prisoners or women among this batch, though pretty nearly every race of Asiatic or European Russia was represented. Swarthy Caucasians, Kirghiz Tartars, Jews from Odessa, thieves from Moscow and St. Petersburg, every race and age, from beardless boys to decrepit old men, were represented. One got callous to it after a time, but my first meeting with a gang of prisoners *en route* to the mines was one I shall never forget. One poor old fellow especially excited sympathy: a man of sixty or seventy years old, with a refined, aristocratic face, who had evidently seen better days, and who could scarcely stagger along under his heavy chains. It would have been ridiculous, had it not been pitiable, to see the little luxuries the old fellow had provided himself with: a little brass teapot, a bag of tea slung round his neck, a loaf of white bread in his arms, and a huge umbrella! At length the hulk was empty, the officer gave the word, "Quick march," and the long grey procession filed off up the hill and into the drab-coloured prison, which the gang we had seen in the morning had just vacated for their use. The incident cast quite a gloom over our spirits, and I remembered for many

days the sad, wistful look the poor old fellow gave, as he entered the prison-gate, at the bright blue waters of the lake, beyond which lay the home he would never see again—for his crime was forgery—his sentence, life at the gold-mines of Nertchinsk.

It was nearly six o'clock before we got away, for there were three tarantasses besides our own to be hoisted on board. The fare across was not ruinous, eight roubles first, and five roubles second class, the freight of the tarantass being twelve roubles. I was rather relieved at this, for funds were running, uncomfortably short, and I did not relish the idea of being stranded on the road. Counting our combined purses, we found the amount was under forty roubles, and we were still more than thirty miles from Irkoutsk, and a night's lodging to pay. Our course was an oblique one across the lake about W.S.W. to Listvenitz, near the mouth of the river Angara. Some distance from the shore the water became marvellously transparent. From the bows, before the ripple had disturbed the surface, one could distinguish large fish swimming about at least thirty feet down, so clear was the water.

The steamer, though crowded with people, was clean and well appointed. There was no food on board, though a huge samovar, flanked by glasses, hissed in the cabin, for the use of those who wished to make tea.

It became very cold after sundown, and we retired to the tarantass forward, where, the head being to the wind, we kept pretty warm. In the hold were twenty convicts returning to their homes after a captivity of twenty years at Nertchinsk and Chita. One of them, who looked at least fifty, was, he told Radovitch, only thirty-three, and had been in the mines ever since he was sixteen. All were still in prison dress, and seemed rather ashamed of mixing with the other passengers. When it became dark, however, they lost their shyness, and, seated in a ring on deck, sang several prison songs—melancholy, dirge-like airs in the minor key. One appeared to be a great favourite, for passengers and sailors alike joined in the chorus. It was, Radovitch told us, composed originally by a prisoner, the refrain being, "Whither leads the dark road of Siberia?" and was so weird and beautiful, that it rang in my ears for days afterwards.

The passengers on board were of a mixed kind, but civil and good-humoured. It was rather trying, till one got used to it, being stared at in our tarantasses like wild beasts in a show, but one got used to it in time. After all it was only natural, for few of our fellow-passengers had ever seen an Englishman before. There were many Jews among them : fat, greasy fellows, with large gold thumb-rings, and flowing hair, and some of the loveliest children I ever beheld. One, a little girl of about fourteen, with very light flaxen hair, the lightest of blue eyes, and thick, black lashes, was a perfect picture.

We arrived at Listvenitz about 1 a.m., having taken about eight hours to do the passage, a little more than the distance from Dover to Calais ! On landing we were ushered into the Custom-House, a long, bare room, where our luggage was minutely examined, two Cossacks being on guard the while to see that no one escaped inspection. It was not the brief examination we are accustomed to in Europe. A Customs' officer, gorgeous in green and gold, stood in the centre of the room, and called out our names one by one, each having to bring up his luggage as best he could, for there were no porters.

As there were over one hundred passengers, this performance lasted some hours, no one being allowed to leave till every box in the place had been opened and carefully searched. By the time we got to the rest-house it was nearly three o'clock in the morning. It was a dirty, ill-smelling place, and we were devoured by vermin, but managed to get something to eat before we turned in, the only food we had tasted the whole day being a couple of eggs and some black bread at mid-day.

But another difficulty now arose. The duty that we had paid on tobacco, &c., had dwindled our little store down to ten roubles and a few kopeks. The bare posting-fare to Irkoutsk was, we ascertained, six roubles, and there would be our night's lodging to pay, which would come to five roubles more at the very least. Money was awaiting us at Irkoutsk, but how to get at it? There was but one way out of the dilemma; one of us must remain at Listvenitz while the other posted on to Irkoutsk and procured the needful. Radovitch entering while we were discussing the subject, overheard part of our conversation. "You are short of money?" said the friendly Russian; "why did you not ask me before?" at the same time producing a fifty rouble

note. "Here, take this; you can pay me back at Irkoutsk, or where you like. I am off now. We shall meet again to-morrow. I suppose you will go to the Moskovskaya," and he had gone, and we heard him jingle away in his tarantass before we could stammer out a word of thanks.

A message came shortly after from the Chief of Police, to say that he would call at eleven o'clock, and that we must not leave Listvenitz till our tarantass had been searched. This was vexing, as, the Customs' examination over, we had replaced all our luggage, and any one who has ever packed one of these vehicles knows what a weary, heart-breaking job it is. However, it was no use grumbling, and we set to work and laid the things open on the ground, pending the great man's arrival.

He turned up about mid-day, a tall, strapping fellow, with long Dundreary whiskers, accompanied by his interpreter, a Polish exile. The examination took over an hour, for he looked at everything, more, I soon saw, from curiosity than anything else. My journal especially attracted his attention.

"Read some of it out," he said to his attendant, settling himself comfortably on the steps of the rest-

house and lighting a cigarette. I was somewhat nervous at this, having expressed my views as to Russian habits and customs rather freely since leaving Kiakhta. The Pole opened the book at the very place I wished him to avoid, but, to my surprise, he turned hastily over to the next page, winking covertly at me as he did so, and I breathed again. On being told there was nothing offensive in the MS., his chief became quite jocose and friendly, insisted on our drinking with him, pumping me the while as much as he was able on the subject of India. What area was it? what population? were there many railways? Did we allow Russians to enter? &c. "Tell him," he said as he rose to go, and I had answered as best I could his somewhat vague questions, "that we shall take it from them some day," with which polite remark he bade us good day, swaggered away down the street, and we saw him no more.

Listvenitz is built in a sort of lagoon, or land-locked habour. It is used by the people of Irkoutsk as a watering-place in summer, and there were many pretty villas and lodging-houses built about on the beach, which is of hard sand,

and affords capital bathing, though it shelves in a few feet to a depth of twenty or thirty fathoms. We were to have horses at six that evening, and took a stroll after the mid-day meal to a low hill about a mile distant, whence there was a picturesque view of the little cluster of pretty villas nestling in woods and gardens. It was a lovely day, with a blue, cloudless sky; and the civilized surroundings, picturesque peasantry, and great sheet of water sparkling in the sunshine, reminded one not a little of Swiss or Italian lake scenery.

The Polish interpreter called on us in the afternoon, bringing with him a book of photographs, the portraits of brethren who were suffering in the cause of freedom. His story was, if true, a remarkable one. Sent to Vologda in European Russia in 1867 for a trifling offence, he managed to escape to Odessa, and thence to New York, returning to Paris in 1870 to take a prominent part in the Commune. He again managed to escape when the Imperial troops entered Paris, and luckily, for himself, for if caught he would assuredly have been shot. After a

short residence in Geneva, he was sent by his society on a secret mission to St. Petersburg; but this time his luck deserted him, and he was captured and sent to Siberia, first to the mines of Kara, then to Listvenitz for life. Among the photographs was one of a young and pretty girl about eighteen or twenty years old. "That," said the Pole with pride, "is Vera Figner, who shot dead the Police Commissary of Odessa. She is my sister-in-law," he added. "This is my wife, who was concerned in Alexander's assassination. Would you like to know her? My house is but a stone's throw from here." But we politely refused the invitation, and, to our great relief, he shortly afterwards left us, with the remark, "Well, good-bye, gentlemen, you have been a ray of sunshine in my life. It is dark enough, God knows, but I do not despair. I hope to do some *good work* yet!" He was a mean-looking, insignificant little fellow, but we heard afterwards at Irkoutsk that he was one of the most dangerous characters in Siberia. His greatest punishment was, he told us, being shunned by everybody in the place (for he was the only exile there) and being deprived of books and papers. Murderer and

Nihilist though he was, one could not help pitying him.

Our horses arrived about seven o'clock, and after a final examination of the tarantass, we rattled away from Listvenitz, hoping to reach Irkoutsk by midnight. The country west of Baikal is densely wooded, but not mountainous. There is a good deal of cultivated ground between the mouth (or rather source) of the Angara and the city, and the country is fairly populated. The road, too, was in better order than any we had yet experienced, and we dashed along merrily to the end of the second stage, Patrone, where our high spirits underwent a slight check. We could have no horses till 5 a.m. It was now ten o'clock, and though only eighteen versts from Irkoutsk, we were compelled to sleep, or rather wait in the filthy post-house till morning. It is curious that we invariably found, throughout our journey, the nearer the town the dirtier the post-house. The one or two first stages from Irkoutsk, on the other side, were simply uninhabitable.

The road follows the banks of the Angara all the way to Irkoutsk. The river, rather more than

a mile wide at the mouth, rolls down a tremendous volume of water, a steep incline at the inlet, and forms a huge rapid nearly three miles long. Halfway across is the "Shaman Kamen," or Spirit Stone, a bare rock nearly hidden in the seething mass of foam and breakers. There is a legend among the peasantry, that were this island washed away, Lake Baikal would overflow, destroy the capital, and turn the whole Angara Valley into one huge sea. The "Chamans," a sect now nearly died out, believe that the souls of the departed are transported to the "Shaman Kamen," and are compelled to cling for a night to the steep, slippery rock; a very difficult proceeding. If they succeed in remaining till the following morning, they are saved, and received into eternal bliss; if not, they are engulfed for ever. Seen from above the rapids, the seething mass of white foam, the precipitous, rugged cliffs on either side, thickly clad with pine and cedars, and the blue waters of the lake stretching away to the foot of the Amar Daban, with itssnowy summit on the Trans-Baikal shore, combine, on a clear evening, to make this one of the most wird and beautiful panoramas imaginable.

We called for the samovar, and beguiled the weary hours with "chi" till past midnight. The post-house swarmed with vermin, and we here made the acquaintance, for the first time, of a small white bug, peculiar to Siberia. Its bite is very poisonous, and sets up a state of intolerable irritation and inflammation, for it burrows under the skin. Nothing but copious applications of ammonia gave relief, and our clothes and bodies swarmed with these when we reached Irkoutsk a few hours later. I give these details, which may seem repulsive to the reader, to show exactly the amount of discomfort one has to go through in the shape of minor annoyances as well as greater ones on the great Post-Road.

About daybreak the jingle of collar-bells announced the arrival of the horses. The landscape now became less wooded, the broad blue river running through fields of rye and barley, while the banks on either side of the road were covered with lilies of the valley and violets, which deliciously perfumed the clear morning air. Presently we left the river, to emerge on a sandy plain. Here our driver alighted, and removed the yoke-bells,

a law prevailing in Siberia which forbids their being used in cities. A few minutes more and we were well in sight of the white buildings, golden domes, and green roofs, of the capital of Eastern Siberia, Irkoutsk.

CHAPTER VIII.

IRKOUTSK.

THERE is probably no country in the world of which the generality of English people are so ignorant as Siberia. The very word conveys to the mind visions of frozen steppes and lonely pine forests, with nothing to break the monotony of the white and dreary landscape but an occasional gang of prisoners or pack of wolves. Many asked, on my return to England, if I had not suffered terribly from the cold, and seemed quite surprised to hear that the Siberian climate is, in summer, often too warm to be pleasant, that the country itself is in many parts one of the most fertile and beautiful in the world.

The city of Irkoutsk, which has a population of over 50,000, was founded in the year 1680, and is situated on a peninsula formed by the confluence of

two rivers, the Angara, which, rising in Lake Baikal, joins the river Yenisei just below Yeniseisk, and falls with it into the frozen ocean, and the small and less important Irkout River. In spring, when the Angara is swollen by the breaking of the ice in Lake Baikal, inundations at Irkoutsk are frequent, and cause great destruction to life and property.

The great province or Government of Irkoutsk is bounded on the east by the Pacific Ocean, on the north by the Frozen Ocean, on the west by the province of Tomsk (Western Siberia), and on the south by the vast chain of mountains known as the Altai range, which divide Siberia from the Chinese possessions in Mongolia. The Government is divided into four districts, viz. Irkoutsk proper, Nertchinsk, Yakoutsk and Okhotsk. A great proportion of the inhabitants of this enormous area are Toungouses and Yakouts, wandering semi-savage tribes who live by hunting and fishing, and of which the Toungouses are the most numerous. The residence of the Governor-General of Eastern Siberia, who at the time of our visit was General Ignatieff, a brother of the famous diplomat, is at Irkoutsk.

The climate is, on the whole, good. Irkoutsk is not nearly so cold in winter as many other Siberian towns. In summer the temperature is pleasant and equable, the unhealthiest time of year being the autumn, when dense fogs are productive of much rheumatism and lung disease, but as a rule the public health is excellent, for the city is beautifully drained. It would be strange were it otherwise, with the broad, resistless flood of the Angara for ever foaming by. Epidemics are rare, with the exception of small pox, a disease frequently brought to Irkoutsk and other towns of Eastern Siberia by tea-caravans from China. Cholera is unknown.

My ideas of Siberia were, before I left England, extremely vague. It is a country in which, before I undertook this voyage, I had taken but little or no interest. There are but few works written bearing upon the region we passed through. The only ones I had ever read on the subject were "Michel Strogoff" and "Called Back"! The reader will judge for himself how faithfully these authors have portrayed Irkoutsk, the scene of the "Courier of the Czar's" triumph,

and the meeting between "Dr. Ceneri," and "Gilbert Vaughan!"

It was a bright sunny morning, when, about 8 a.m. on the 12th of August, we dashed into the city, and, after a longish drive through its broad and deserted streets, drew up with a flourish at the door of the "Moskovskaya Podovorié," the principal hotel. Let not the reader imagine a dilapidated wooden hut, such as I myself had conjured up visions of, but a handsome, four-storied stone building, with gorgeously furnished apartments, a lift, electric bells, and "*Table-d'hôte* à 6 heures"! As we ascend the broad, well-carpeted stairs, with a polite and white-waistcoated manager leading the way, while a gold-lace-capped porter follows with our luggage, it is hard to realize that we are still on the borders of China, and over four thousand miles from a railway.

Irkoutsk presents, at first sight, an untidy, unfinished appearance. Like most Siberian towns, its buildings are a strange mixture of squalor and grandeur. The majority are of brick, for since the great fire of 1879 a law has been passed forbidding the construction of any more wooden

dwellings. The consequence is that the greater part of the city presents a patch-work appearance, the lofty mansion of a millionaire gold-miner, with its conservatories and gardens, often standing next door to the dilapidated wooden hovel of some peasant with half its roof off, which has been partially saved from the flames. One's first feeling on walking through the streets is one of intense depression, for a more melancholy-looking city does not exist. The streets, though wide and regular, give one the idea of being continually up for repair. One looks instinctively for the "No Thoroughfare" board. Although so much care is lavished on the architecture and decoration of buildings, the streets are apparently left to look after themselves. Unpaved and uneven, one comes across holes that would play sad havoc with a springed carriage, which article, however, does not exist here, at least among the public vehicles. The pavements, which are of rough pine with light wooden guard-rails, are barely three feet wide.

The "Grande Rue" is the principal street;

a thoroughfare nearly a mile long, which would not disgrace a European city, so far as buildings are concerned. It is the only street whence the old wooden dwellings have entirely disappeared, to give place to fine, well-built houses and Government offices. The principal shops are situated here, but, though one may buy almost anything in this far-away corner of the globe, from an English steam plough to a Parisian bonnet, there is no outward or visible sign in any of the windows of the goods sold within. Merely a roughly painted board over the doorway indicating the name and business of the proprietor, and a notice to the effect that from twelve o'clock mid-day till three p.m. he is not at home. To the nakedness of the shop-windows, perhaps, among other reasons, may be attributed the dismal appearance the place presents. Perhaps, too, the black roads, total absence of trees or gardens, or indeed of colour of any kind, has much to do with the sense of depression that fastens on one after ever so short a residence in any Siberian town. I cannot say exactly why, but one's only thought, after a couple of days was invariably, "When

shall I get away?" and this though the sun was shining brightly at the time, and the day in any ordinary country would have been one to raise and enliven the spirits. Here the sunshine only served to reveal more plainly the dirty, unwashed appearance which everything, including the natives, presented.

You can seldom tell a Siberian (so-called) gentleman apart from the lower orders, though the income of the wealthier gold-miners would enable them to live in luxury in London or Paris. It should, one would think, also provide them with an occasional collar and a clean shirt once a week, but it doesn't. Wealth in Siberia apparently makes no difference to the garb of an individual. All, high or low, wear the same suit of rusty black; all have the same dirty, unkempt look. A pair of high boots, with square toes and very high heels, and small, narrow-peaked caps, complete the costume. All look as if they slept in their clothes, which, by the way, they probably do, for sheets are unknown in Siberia (except at the Moskovskaya Podovorié), and in many houses, beds also. I heard, when at

Tomsk, of a gold-miner, worth some thousands sterling a year, who always slept on two chairs. but at the same time imported his horses and carriage, grapes and hothouse pines from St. Petersburg, and had had a grand piano sent out to him from Paris. The women in Irkoutsk dressed well as a rule, and some, but not many, were good-looking. A Siberian lady seldom wears a hat in summer, but a black or white silk handkerchief twisted round the head. Nor is this head-dress with a pretty face beneath it, by any means unbecoming.

We were not sorry to turn in to bed and enjoy a good ten hours' rest after the fatiguing journey from Kiakhta, and slept none the less soundly for the knowledge that when we woke what the Americans call a good square feed would be awaiting us, a luxury we had not enjoyed since leaving Pekin. The hasty snatches of food we got at Kiakhta were too frequently interrupted by pugilistic encounters and toasts in "Vodka" to be dignified by the name of meals!

A slight disappointment awaited us, though, on waking, at the scanty washing appliances this

gorgeous hostelry provided. Baths there were of course none. We did not expect it, but we had at any rate looked forward to a wash-hand basin. But, the only appliance furnished was a small tin vessel holding about a pint of water, and nailed up against the bedroom wall. On turning a small tap, a thin trickling stream of water ran out, so that by holding your hands under it for half a minute or so, you could just manage to wet them all over, and with this, we had to manage. One had at any rate the advantage of privacy, and could wash (so to speak) in one's own bedroom. It was better than at Tomsk, where the hotel only boasted one of these tin abominations, and it was fixed up in the passage, *pro bono publico*.

We strolled out in the evening to the public gardens, gardens in name only, for the stunted shrubs are not worthy of the name of trees, and there were no flowers and very little grass. The lovely night, had brought out all the *élite* of Irkoutsk, to listen to the band of a Cossack regiment, which performed in a brilliantly lighted kiosk in the centre of the square. But our light tweed suits and high brown boots

attracted so much attention and created such consternation among the rook-like garments of the inhabitants, that we nearly beat a hasty retreat. The temptation of good music and a cigar in the moonlight, however, was too much for us, and we remained undeterred by the searching and not altogether complimentary glances of those around us, who seemed to look upon the appearance of any stranger in their midst as an unwarrantable intrusion and insult. I am bound to say that for downright rudeness and vulgarity, the Siberian male, *pur et simple*, is unequalled. It seems the more strange that their countrymen west of the Ourals are undoubtedly, next the French, the most courteous and polite nation in the world.

There are three distinct classes of society in Irkoutsk: the Government officials, millionaire gold-miners, and tradespeople. It is probably the only city in the world where the latter are in reality the most aristocratic portion of the community, for the simple reason that they are most of them political exiles who, in Russia or Poland, were of good birth and position till they lost name and individuality in a prison number. The

Government officials and military stationed in Irkoutsk form a clique of their own, from which they rigidly exclude the gold-mining millionaire, a class of men the like of which I have never met, thank Heaven, out of Siberia.

Most of the latter commence life as common miners, and gradually rise, more by luck than anything else, to a position of affluence; indeed many of them make colossal fortunes. In summer they live at the mines, working like the very labourers nature intended them to be; but the early part of November sees them back in Irkoutsk or Tomsk, as the case may be. Then commences a life of unbridled debauchery and dissipation, which only ends with the return of the spring.

Vanity and snobbishness are the chief failings of these men, who will not notice you, though you may have dined with them the preceding evening, if you happen to be walking, not driving, in the street, or wearing astrakhan instead of beaver. I asked one why he did not go to St. Petersburg or Paris and enjoy his enormous income instead of burying himself in the wilds of Asia. The reply was characteristic: "Here in Irkoutsk I

am a great man, what should I be in Paris or St. Petersburg?" I knew, but did not tell him.

The find of gold is yearly increasing in Siberia. It is found in large quantities at Nertchinsk and Kara in the Trans-Baikal districts, but the most productive mines are those lying around Yeneseisk, Kansk, and the sources of the great Lena River, Yuz and Abakansk in Southern Siberia. Any one (being a Russian subject) may work the gold, but all that is found must be sold to Government only, a private individual discovered with nuggets or gold dust in his possession is severely punished, be he owner or the lowest workman in the mine. At first sight the rent of a mine in Siberia seems absurdly low. For instance the Yuz Gold-field in Southern Siberia, a tract of land five versts long by four broad, is leased to the workers at 300 roubles[1] per annum. On the other hand, the royalty is high, and the cost of labour enormous. The commonest miner earns his 1800 to 2000 roubles

[1] The word "Rouble" is derived from the Russian word *Roupit* "to cut," so called because up to four hundred years ago the Russians used bar silver as coinage.

during the season, which lasts from April to the middle or end of October, according to the severity or mildness of the weather.

But the outlay is well worth it. Two mine-owners round Krasnoiarsk made, in less than ten years, over two million pounds sterling, and there is now in Irkoutsk a M. Trapeznikoff who is worth his four millions at the very least. The latter, a bachelor under fifty years of age, hardly ever leaves his palace at Irkoutsk, except for a few weeks in the summer to visit the mines. He is, unlike the majority of his *confrères*, an educated man and a gentleman. Here is a chance for mothers with marriageable daughters. The journey to Irkoutsk will be easily made in another year or so by railway from Tomsk.

It seems a pity that millions of money should be thrown away on such savages. Though there is plenty of sport in the immediate neighbourhood, good deer and bear shooting, and excellent salmon fishing in the Angara, they never dream of taking out a gun or rod. The millionaires of Irkoutsk have, with few exceptions, but little idea of real comfort. You call upon one of these Siberian Van-

derbilts at 11 a.m., and he will produce champagne, and be offended if you refuse to drink with him. Dine with him, and though you may be raging with thirst, you will only get Kümmel, Chartreuse, or sticky messes of a like nature, to wash down your dinner, though it be prepared by a "Chef" from Paris, in receipt of a higher salary than many an English rector. Stay the night with your host, and you will be shown to a bedroom gorgeously furnished, and a *chef-d'œuvre* of the upholsterer's art, replete with every luxury that money can buy, with one exception: you will search in vain for a bed, and must turn in, as you are, clothes and all, on the sofa. Look under the thick Turkey carpets, and you will find the flooring an inch thick with dust, and, behind the curtains, the plate-glass windows coated with dirt; comfort and cleanliness everywhere given up to ostentation and swagger. In one house that I dined at, an enormous gold nugget was placed on the table, and used as an ash-tray, our host announcing in a loud voice that its use in this capacity lost him annually 300*l.* sterling in interest! We had a couple of introductions to these merchant-princes, but only

handed one, fearing that on a second occasion our temper might get the better of our good manners. On our entry into the drawing-room, only the hostess and her daughters favoured us by shaking our hands. The men stood round, made remarks to each other on our personal appearance, and every now and then burst into fits of half-suppressed laughter. I am bound to admit the women looked ashamed of their male relations, as well they might. Be it understood I am now talking of a particular class, for among the Siberian peasantry rudeness is very rare, and we met with nothing but hospitality and kindness. I have already described the manner in which the merchants of Eastern Siberia spend their evenings. There is no difference, except that in some houses the givers of the entertainment do precede their orgies with a hurried meal, eaten standing. The sooner over the better, so that the real business of the evening, drinking, may commence. I only twice assisted at these evening parties in Siberia, once at Kiakhta, and once at Irkoutsk. As I have said, each left the same impression on my mind as a head-feast I once witnessed among a race of savages in Central Borneo, who after a

victory, deliberately got drunk for three days on end. But the "untutored savage" was far less idiotic and revolting on these occasions than the Siberian "Gentleman," could such an anomaly as the latter exist.

The ladies of Irkoutsk are for the most part lazy, indolent creatures, with no ideas beyond immoral intrigues, dress (on which they spend thousands), and Zola's novels, which, translated into Russian, have an enormous sale in the towns of Siberia. The greater part of the day is spent in sleeping and smoking cigarettes, for in winter they seldom retire to rest till five or six in the morning. Though most of their houses boast a grand piano, the instrument is solely kept for ornament, and seldom opened. Two schools for girls have, however, lately been established, and many of them now speak French and German, and are well educated in other ways, but morality at Irkoutsk is at a very low ebb. One can scarcely wonder at it, considering the frivolous, excitable lives of the women, and drunkenness and sensuality of the men.

Strange as it may seem, we found the society of the tradespeople in Irkoutsk far more congenial to

our taste than that of their so-called superiors. Many of the former are exiles sent to Siberia after the Polish insurrection of 1862, and permitted after their five years of imprisonment at Nertchinsk or Kara to settle and obtain employment in the capital. I met one (a photographer) who had had hotels at Paris and Warsaw and his villa on the Riviera in happier times, a charming old man with an only daughter, a pretty girl of sixteen, who, he used to say with tears in his eyes, would probably never see dear Poland. His wife had died on the road in giving birth to the child, who, in sad memory of those dark days, the old man had named "Kara."

We had many a laugh together over the vulgar eccentricities of his rich customers. "They are terrible, are they not?" he would say with a shrug of his shoulders, "*mais que voulez-vous?* What can this cursed country produce but men like that, convicts, bears, and wolves!"

I never could discover who my old friend was, for, like most of his countrymen, he abandoned his name or title the day he crossed the Ourals into Asia. Nor would he ever volunteer any information respecting his past life; but

he seemed, on the whole, fairly contented with his lot. Sixteen years of exile had reconciled him more or less to the loss of the home he would never see again.

A common expression among exiles, even of a higher class, when they want to fix the date of any past event is, "It was six months after I left prison." "It was a year before I got my discharge," &c. They do not seem the least ashamed of their incarceration; on the contrary, are rather proud of it. The barman of the Moskovskaya Podovorié, who presided over a glittering array of champagne and liqueur bottles, smoked ham, caviare, pickled salmon, and other delicacies, in the café just below our window, had served five years in the Nertchinsk mine. This same café, by the way, was rather a nuisance, for it formed the favourite trysting-place of the *Jeunesse Dorée* of Irkoutsk at the closing of the theatres, and they sometimes kept it up till four in the morning. Another custom in Siberian towns extremely irritating to those of a wakeful disposition, is the incessant beating together, by the watchman, of two pieces of metal, which produces a very sharp,

ringing sound. This noise, which goes on in every street without intermission from sunset to sunrise, is made to warn thieves and malefactors that the police are on the alert, a watchman to every street. I could never understand why such pains should be taken to herald their approach, and fancy some of our English burglars would give a good yearly subscription to have the same practice instituted.

One was constantly being assailed in Irkoutsk by mysterious individuals with documents which they wished delivered to their friends in Europe. I was asked to do this by at least a dozen suspicious-looking characters, who forced their way into our room at the hotel without knocking, and often declined to leave. The mention of the word "Police," though usually had the desired effect. One of these letters was, I remember, addressed to a house in Greek Street, Soho. I passed the latter only the other day, and was sincerely glad that I had not undertaken the commission. Judging from the look of the place, one would have stood a good chance, even in the day-time, of being robbed and murdered, to say nothing of the

danger of being caught by the Siberian police with a compromising paper in one's possession.

The exiles do not have such a bad time of it as we, in England, are generally led to believe. Their term of imprisonment over, they are free to come and go as they please, and enjoy absolute freedom so long as they behave themselves, and do not give vent to their opinions too freely. I met many, of good birth and position, but from none did I hear the harrowing tales of persecution and cruelty that in England seem inseparable from the very name of Siberia. Cruelty may, and no doubt does, exist in the convict settlements of Kara and Nertchinsk in the Trans-Baikal districts, where the worst characters are sent,—Black nihilists, for instance, or those who have attempted the life of the Czar. The latter do not, like minor political offenders, get their ticket-of-leave, but remain in the mines for life. There is a prevailing impression at home that "in the mines" means literally what the words convey, that prisoners are sent down a pit to work all day and a greater part of the night, never again to see daylight till they have become reduced to a dying state by the poisonous exhalations of quick-

silver. As a matter of fact, *there is not a quicksilver mine in the whole of Siberia*, those at Kara and Nertchinsk being of gold and silver. Quicksilver may exist in small quantities, but is not, and never has been, worked.

In former days exiles made the journey from European Russia to Irkoutsk, or whatever district they were sentenced to, on foot, but nearly half the journey to Kara (the most remote penal settlement excepting Yakoutzk and Sakhalien) is now done by steamboat and railway. Prisoners are sent from all parts of Russia to Moscow, where they are divided into gangs of three or four hundred. From Moscow they travel by rail to Nijni Novgorod, and thence to Perm in a prison ship or barge. From Perm the railway conveys them to Tiumen, whence another prison barge carries them down the Obi River, distributing *en route* all those destined for places in Western Siberia, until at Tomsk the remainder are disembarked, and the long tramp across Asia commences. No travelling is done in winter. The transportation season commences on the 15th of April and ends on the 7th of October. As for the march itself, it is a very different thing to what I

pictured it before I saw with my own eyes how well Russian prisoners are treated. I shall perhaps hardly be believed when I say that crimes are sometimes committed by the lower orders in European Russia on purpose to be sent to Siberia. The criminals know that their term of imprisonment over, they will (if well behaved) have a grant of land and a house given them, and begin life afresh in a new country.

We passed many hundreds of prisoners on the postroad between Irkoutsk and Tomsk, but in no single instance did I see a case of cruelty such as that mentioned by the author of "The Russians of To-day." Were the voyage to Siberia anything like the following description, it would indeed be a "Via Dolorosa." He says:—

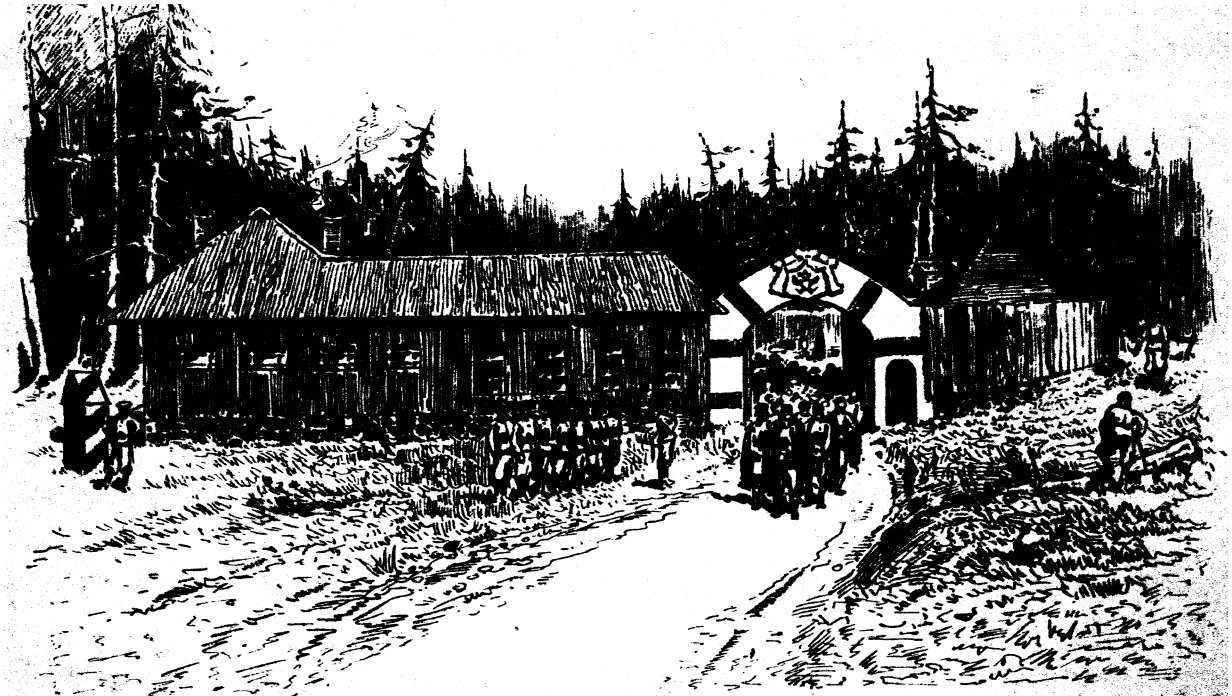
"The convicts are forwarded to Siberia in convoys which start at the commencement of spring, just after the snows have melted and left the ground dry. They perform the whole journey on foot, escorted by mounted Cossacks, who are armed with pistols, lances and long whips, and behind them jolt a long string of springless tumbrils to carry those who fall lame or ill on the way. The start is always made in the night, and care is taken that the convoys

shall only pass through the towns on their road after dark. Each man is dressed in a grey kaftan, having a brass numbered plate fastened to the breast, knee-boots and a sheep's-skin bonnet. He carries a rug strapped to his back, a mess-tin and a wooden spoon at his girdle. The women have black cloaks with hoods, and march in gangs by themselves with an escort of soldiers like the men, and two or three female warders, who travel in carts."

In another part of the book:—"Nihilist conspirators, patriotic Poles, and young student girls are all mixed up, and tramp together with the criminals."

This is indeed a sensational picture, but I cannot think the author has ever visited the scene he so graphically describes. As for "care being taken that convoys shall only pass through towns on their road after dark," the largest gang of prisoners I ever saw was in the streets of Irkoutsk at three o'clock in the afternoon. The Cossacks who accompany the prisoners are not mounted at all, nor are they armed with lances or whips, but simply loaded rifles.

Whenever we passed a gang, once a day on an average, the prisoners seemed to be the last thing the Cossacks were thinking of, as, at intervals of about twenty yards, the latter lounged slowly along, picking berries and smoking cigarettes, while the convicts in the road-way chatted, laughed and joked among themselves (and sometimes with their guards) in a very different frame of mind from that described by the author I have mentioned. The women, it is true, marched with the men, but the bare idea of "nihilist conspirators" being "mixed up and tramping together" with the criminals is as absurd as it is incorrect. Political prisoners are allowed in Siberia to "mix up" with no one, but sent alone in charge of two gendarmes to whatever town or village they are destined. Not only are they kept apart in the prisons, where separate cells are provided for them, but also on the road. Nor are they sent with gangs of criminals, or in the prison barges, but taken by passenger-steamer to Tomsk, and thence in a four-wheeled cart or téléga, to their destination. Should it be indispensable to send them with a gang, they travel in carts at an interval of one or two miles from the main body. The



A VILLAGE OSTROG.—CONVICTS ON THE MARCH.

gendarmes never let them out of sight, and allow them to speak to no one, though they may retain and wear their own clothes till they arrive at the mines, if condemned there. Many are simply sent to reside at some town or village till their term of punishment is over.

Convicts were formerly sent to Saghalien by road, *viâ* Irkoutsk and the Amur, but are now transported direct from Odessa. I was told at Moscow, that a few years hence all criminals and political offenders will be sent to Saghalien by sea direct, and banishment to Siberia become a thing of the past. For the truth of this assertion, however, I cannot vouch.

The usual marching is two days' work to one day's rest, travelling, on an average, about eighteen to twenty miles a day. There are about four hundred prisons in all in Siberia, in fact every village we passed on the road from Irkoutsk to Tomsk had its "ostrog." All, from the shores of the sea of Okhotzk to the Oural mountains, are built exactly alike of wood painted a light yellow, the roof being of a dull brick-red colour. In each prison are four or more cells for the politicals. The criminals, men and women, are herded together in one

large room, round the sides of which are inclined wooden planks to sleep or lounge upon. The town prisons are built of stone, and are, of course, very much larger. The Alexandreffski prison, for instance, about thirty miles from Irkoutsk, contains over twelve hundred convicts.

The number of exiles sent to Siberia during the past few years has been on an average 15,000 to 18,000 per annum, including women and children. As a rule, the lesser criminals are sent to settlements in Western Siberia, nihilists and murderers to Kara and Saghalien, some of the former even as far as Yakoutsk, which is said to be the hottest place in summer, and coldest in winter, in the world. From Kara there is no escape. Few ever try to get away, for the uninhabited regions on the north, and desert of Gobi on the south, effectually cut off all chances of escape, while east and west a prisoner stands the chance of being shot down by the Bouriates and other wandering tribes, a reward of three roubles a head, living or dead, being offered by Government for runaways. On the whole, there is no doubt that the Russian Government treats its prisoners far better than we in England are inclined to give it credit for. Even

nihilists are fairly well treated, though, of course, the majority of them are educated men, and feel their degradation far more keenly than the hardened, low-born criminals.

As for the latter, they have no complaint whatever to make as to food and clothing; each man has two pounds of black bread, three-quarters of a pound of meat, and a small allowance of quass daily. This, it must be remembered, is what Government actually allows him. He may make what he can on the road in addition to this, by soliciting alms from travellers and caravans. The prison-gates present a curious sight of an evening, half an hour before the arrival of a convoy. It is a miniature market, where huge baskets of berries, jam, kalachi or rolls, quass, new milk, are spread out in tempting array on snow-white tablecloths, for the benefit of the fortunate ones who have succeeded in obtaining a few kopeks from compassionate travellers.

Imagine a convict travelling from Portland to Dartmoor being allowed to beg at the railway stations! Every village prison, too, has its recreation-ground, where there are trapezes, parallel

English beer was still dearer. Champagne is drunk in enormous quantities by Siberians, but it is sweet, mawkish stuff. It was half as cheap again as the claret, and bore the most extraordinary brand I have ever seen—the English and American flags crossed over a horse and jockey! However, it suited the consumers, who, like Russians, dislike dry champagne. Poultry, fish, and eggs are absurdly cheap. Two hundred of the latter can be bought for one rouble. The Siberian has tastes somewhat akin to the Chinese in the matter of eggs. I was frequently asked at post-houses whether I would like mine old, straw flavoured, or fresh!

There was no lack of amusement in the evening. Two theatres (French and Russian), a circus, and several open-air concerts were always open to us. I witnessed one evening a performance of the "Cloches de Corneville," most creditable both as regards artistes and orchestra. Opera bouffe at Irkoutsk! Had I been told a year before that it existed there, I should have set down my informant as a lunatic. The streets were far from safe at night, and two men were stabbed during the short time we were

there. Being unlit, they present great facilities for the exercise of their profession to the gentlemen who take up their residence in the lower quarters of the town after a sojourn at Kara or Nertchinsk. No one in Irkoutsk ever walks abroad after dark unarmed.

There was little to do in the daytime but flatten one's nose against the hotel windows and look out on to the dreary market-place opposite, watching the busy crowds of buyers and sellers. It was the only market-place in Siberia where I ever saw flowers exposed for sale, but they were faded, scentless things. It always struck me as curious that, although wild flowers are so plentiful in Siberia, it is hopeless to try and grow roses or garden flowers. The market was the only place in Irkoutsk which showed any signs of life or animation. Even at mid-day the place looked as if everybody was either dead or asleep. The only signs of life visible were when a squad of soldiers, returning from drill, marched past with a cracked trumpet at their head, or a tea-caravan rattled and jingled across the square. Our sole amusement consisted in watching the cab-stand opposite the hotel, and speculating as

to whether the dozen drivers asleep on their boxes would ever get a fare. We were there a week, and indoors the greater part of the day,—and when indoors looking out of window, for we had no books to read,—but never saw one hired.

The "droshki" or cab of Irkoutsk cannot be called a comfortable vehicle. It is springless, and only built to hold one person besides the driver. In shape it is not unlike a bath-chair without the hood. There is no guard-rail to hold on by, or anything to prevent one being hurled out as it bumps and bounds along the rough, uneven streets. As the drivers always went at full gallop, it was sometimes no easy matter to keep one's seat.

On a fine day one saw many smart turn-outs at Irkoutsk, though the carriages with springs, were, I was told, in a constant state of repair. The chief object of the drivers seemed to be to tear along the streets as fast as they could without breaking down. Many of the horses had the near fore-legs fastened to the hind for this purpose, a method peculiar, I imagine, to Siberia.

There was but one pleasant walk in Irkoutsk,

a kind of boulevard situated on the banks of the Angara. It was a relief to find one's way down here on a sunny afternoon. The sight of a bit of green foliage was refreshing, though the trees were withered, scrubby-looking things at best. There was, at any rate, a certain amount of life and animation in the broad and rapid river, alive with merchandise craft plying to and from Lake Baikal, and ferry-boats carrying passengers to public tea-gardens on the opposite bank. On fine afternoons the boulevard was the favourite haunt of nurses and children, and as a natural consequence soldiers, and reminded one (with a stretch of the imagination) of bits of the Champs Elysées or Tuileries Gardens in far-away Paris, an illusion very soon dispelled on looking back at the black roads and dismal-looking, unfinished city. From here we walked homewards, as a rule, past the Porte de Moscou, a whitewashed brick building on the banks of the Angara, containing two small rooms with barred windows on either side. This arch was built in 1817, and was destined by the Russians to become the permanent prison of Napoleon I. when they should take him prisoner! Although he was in those days such an enemy of their country, Russians, and espe-

cially Siberians, now have the greatest respect for the memory of "Le Petit Caporal." It may indeed be called adoration, for there is a sect at present existing in Siberia, which actually worships the spirit of the Great Emperor. They are called "Napoleonists," and look upon the Czar and Greek Church with contempt, worshipping only the bust of their divinity, which is done with closed doors, and in strict secrecy. The supporters of this strange doctrine maintain that the Emperor still lives, that he escaped from St. Helena after his death, and crossed the seas in spirit to the shores of Lake Baikal, where he resumed his mortality, and now lives in the flesh. In time Napoleon will again raise a huge army, put the Czar and his Government to flight, and himself reign over Russia, after which the world is to be subjected to the Muscovite yoke!

The "Skopti," or "White Doves," is the secret sect said to be the most powerful in Irkoutsk. These look upon Peter III., of Russia, as their divinity, and believe him to be still living, touch no meat, wine, or spirits, but subsist entirely on milk and bread. All are eunuchs, and though they possess no temples or churches, are easily known by

their pale faces and effeminate ways. Their object is to lead a life of absolute purity, and they worship a living virgin and Christ appointed by the elders.

The "Skopti" is perhaps the richest sect that exists in Russia, and many of the wealthiest men in Siberia belong to it. The creed is that as soon as 400,000 converts shall have been gathered into His fold, God will come to reign over them alone. All other religions and faiths shall be destroyed.

There exist also in Siberia the "Flagellants," and "Molokani," or milk-drinkers, but both are inferior in number to the "Skopti." The Molokani came originally from the south of Russia. They believe in Christ, but do not acknowledge His divinity. The Emperor Nicholas so persecuted this sect, that he drove 20,000 of them out of Russia and into the Caucasus. From here many crossed the Black Sea into Turkey, where the Sultan gave them a village, and where they flourish up to the present day undisturbed by Turkish rule.

The "Klysti" or Flagellants date from the 13th century. These originally sprang from one Philipitch, a peasant who, deserting from the Russian army, declared himself to be the Supreme Being, and

travelled over the country far and wide, preaching and making converts. Philipitch's creed was simple enough, certainly, and suited to the understanding of the meanest capacity. It had but three commandments: (1) Drink no wine; (2) Remain where you are and what you are; (3) Never marry. During the performance of their rites the Klysti beat and flog each other unmercifully; but I do not fancy that many Flagellants now exist either in Russia or Siberia. It is certainly not a romantic or fascinating faith.

The time at Irkoutsk hung so heavily on our hands after the first three days, that we resolved to cut down the fortnight's rest we had originally intended taking to one of a week. There was literally nothing of interest to see or do after the first twenty-four hours, and we had no incentive to prolong our stay. One fine morning, however, an apparition made its appearance on the balcony, where we were wont to smoke our morning cigar, that of a young and extremely pretty woman, distinctly not an Irkoutskian, but who looked, with her neat figure and tailor-made gown, as if she had just walked out of Bond Street. The meeting with a countrywoman, as we imagined her to be, lightened considerably the

prospect of the four long weary days that must elapse before we pushed on to Tomsk. Madame R., however, was not an Englishwoman, as we had surmised, but a Dane, who had pluckily braved the danger and discomfort of the roads to accompany her husband (a telegraphic engineer) to Eastern Siberia. Our introduction to the lady was followed by one to Mr. R., and the cheery *déjeûner à quatre* that followed it, soon made us forget Irkoutsk and its depressing monotony; indeed to Mr. and Madame R. are due all the pleasing recollections I have retained of that gloomy city.

CHAPTER IX.

IRKOUTSK (*continued*).

THE shock-headed youth who fulfilled the duties of chambermaid awoke me one morning at the Moskovskaya with the news that that day (the 19th of August) was to witness in Siberia a total eclipse of the sun. I did not learn till afterwards that scientific men had been sent from London, Paris, Berlin, and Petersburg, to Krasnoiarsk, a town about six hundred versts west of Irkoutsk, to witness and report on the eclipse, but the expedition was a failure, the weather at these places being dull and overcast. At Irkoutsk, however, a bright sun and cloudless sky ushered in the eventful morning. The eclipse was to take place at 11.30, but for quite half an hour previously a perceptible change took place in the temperature, which, though it had been close and sultry up till eleven o'clock, now became quite cool, while the light breeze that had been blowing dropped as if by magic. About

eleven the bright sunshine became obscured by a mist something like the lurid glare that precedes a thunderstorm on a summer's day in England. Up till now nothing was observable on the sun's surface as it shone out, like a ball of fire, from the woolly sky, but at 11.20 one could discern, by the aid of an opera-glass, a thin black line creeping from right to left over the great fiery disc, increasing in size to a semicircular blotch, till, at a quarter to twelve, the sun presented the appearance of an apple with a large piece bitten out. Ten minutes more, and nothing was visible but a thin streak of brilliant light surrounding a circular patch of black, while darkness crept over the city, and the stars, one by one, appeared in the heavens.

One could see, in the square below the hotel, a crowd of eager, upturned faces, many of whom had never even heard that the eclipse was expected, and were much disconcerted in consequence. Droshki drivers pulled up their horses and stared open-mouthed; market-women left their stalls, to kneel and cross themselves; every one's face wore an anxious, concerned look, which added not a little to the weirdness of the scene. The effect produced on the animal creation was extraordinary. Horses

neighed, dogs howled, while birds in great flocks flew silently across the starlit sky, apparently bewildered and alarmed at the sudden fall of night. About ten minutes past twelve the black veil over the sun diminished in size, and the darkness commenced to clear away, as, almost imperceptibly, the light of day once more crept slowly over the earth, while one by one the stars faded in the brightening heavens. The air, too, grew gradually warmer, till, at half-past twelve not a trace of the phenomenon was visible, except in the dense, excited crowds discussing it in the market-place. The fall of the temperature during the eclipse was twelve degrees.

Rain fell in torrents, shortly after. This did not, however, prevent us from walking out with R. to the drill-plain, and witnessing a review of the troops. Walking in Irkoutsk on a rainy day is, to say the least of it, unpleasant. The streets are undrained. Great pools of water lie in the roadway, rendering it almost impassable, while the thick dust converts the streets into morasses of deep black mud. We had to wade knee-deep more than once before reaching the parade-ground. The garrison of Irkoutsk is composed mainly of

Cossacks, in number about 10,000. They were not taking to look at, their dingy drab uniforms and dirty white linen caps rendering them far from smart in appearance, though in drill and steadiness they were perfect. All were armed with the "Berdan" rifle.

I strolled into a barber's on the way home, to have my hair cut, a somewhat necessary operation, for it had remained untouched since Shanghai, and was falling about my shoulders in uncomfortable luxuriance. The art of hair-cutting is evidently learnt early at Irkoutsk. On inquiring of a small boy of about eight years old, whether any one was in, he dragged me to a chair, and arming himself with a huge pair of shears, commenced, although he had to mount on a stool to do so, to operate upon me himself. I expected every moment to find myself minus an ear, and was relieved when he had finished, and not a little surprised to find that he had done it extremely well. I felt constrained to buy a bottle of Atkinson's White Rose in consequence, as an encouragement to the youthful disciple of Figaro.

The museum at Irkoutsk is well worth a visit, and is a handsome stone building, erected at con-

siderable cost by one of the millionaires. We spent a long morning there, inspecting the trophies collected from all parts of Siberia by M. Bogdanovitch, a Russianized Frenchman, who spends most of his spare time among the Yakoutz, Tungouses, and other aboriginal Siberian tribes. A word here may not be amiss as to the natives of the vast country through which we are about to take the reader, for the term "Siberian" is a very vague one, comprising as it does the skin-clad aborigines of the shores of the Frozen Ocean to the semi-Chinese "Bouriat," the wild and primitive Kamchatdale to the civilized citizens of Tobolsk or Irkoutsk.

We will work from east to west, and commence with the Kamchatdale. I imagine there are few places in the world so little known as this desolate peninsula, which most people look upon as the uttermost end of the earth when they say, to convey an idea of unlimited distance, "Oh! so-and-so's gone to Kamchatka or some other outlandish place." I have met one of the few Englishmen who have ever visited this dreary peninsula, and can give the reader the benefit of his experience and observations.

The peninsula of Kamchatka is about eight hundred miles long, by one hundred and thirty miles wide, and is situated in the Sea of Okhotsk. Flat and marshy at Cape Lopatka, its southern extremity, the country to the northward becomes mountainous, rocky, and barren, stunted birch and willow trees forming, in most parts, the sole vegetation, save in the valley watered by the Kamchatka River. Here the soil is good and grass abundant, the latter sometimes growing six feet high. Poplar, willow, and cedar of large size are met with, while cabbages, potatoes, and carrots also grow in this oasis, which is situated in the centre of the peninsula. The wild raspberry, currant, and cranberry also abound, and in the springtime many wild and beautiful flowers. But the greater part of Kamchatka is rocky and sterile. A chain of mountains to the east of the peninsula has many volcanoes. The highest and most active, Mount Kluchevski, a peak of greater altitude than Mont Blanc, is near the coast, and visible for many miles out at sea, the base of the mountain having a circumference of over one hundred and fifty miles. Kamchatka is subject to severe shocks of earthquake, as many as ten (on an average) occurring annually at

Petropaulosk, the chief town or settlement. The climate of Kamchatka, though severe, is not so trying to a European constitution as that of the mainland of Eastern Siberia. Frost sets in about the end of October, but up to January the temperature rarely falls to more than 10° below freezing point (Fahr.). February to March are the most trying times, when "Poorgas," or snow-storms, accompanied by tempestuous winds, sweep over the bleak, rocky coast and valleys, occasioning great loss of life and sometimes burying whole villages under the snow.

The population of Kamchatka is roughly estimated at four thousand souls, about five hundred of whom reside at the capital, Petropaulosk, on the eastern coast, which is said to possess the finest harbour in the world, and where the allied French and English fleets were repulsed by the Russians during the Crimean war. The aboriginal tribes, however, are seldom met with in or near the capital, where society consists almost entirely of Government officers and Cossacks, stationed here to preserve law and order among these remote subjects of the Czar, who, however, give them little or no trouble. The chief complaint among military men at this dreary out-

post is that they have nothing to do in the way of fighting to keep their hands in.

The aboriginal inhabitants of Kamchatka are divided into three distinct races: the Koriaks, in the north, the Kamchatdales, in the south, and the Kuriles, a tribe inhabiting the islands of that name, which, lying to the southward of Kamchatka, were lately ceded by Russia to Japan in exchange for the island of Sakhalien. Of these three the Kamchatdales are the most civilized and friendly, probably on account of their more frequent intercourse with Europeans from Petropaulosk and other settlements. They are of a copper colour, with narrow black eyes, thick lips, and flat noses, and long, streaming hair, which they take great delight in plastering over with seal oil, blubber, and other fishy abominations.

A Kamchatdale may be smelt a mile off, their bodies exuding a strong smell of fish, on which they subsist, eaten raw; but they are friendly, hospitable fellows, and, unlike the fierce and savage Koriaks, always glad to welcome or help a stranger. Up till some years since many of the Kamchatdales were Chamans, but this religion has died out a good deal since the advent of Russian

traders, who have replaced it by introducing vodka and debauchery. The Kamchatdales have, curiously enough, a practice identical with one among the Dyaks of Borneo: that of kindling a light by rapidly turning in the hands a dry stick in a hole made in a plank of wood, and using a piece of dry grass as fuel. They are also, like the Dyaks, capital dancers and mimics, imitating in their dances the movements of animals and birds with surprising grace and accuracy.

The Koriaks, on the other hand, are said to be the most treacherous and degraded race in Siberia. Many are nomad, and have no fixed abode, the stationary ones being much finer in physique and less wild than their wandering brothers. Strangely enough, however, they allow the latter to treat them as slaves, and obey them without a murmur. While the nomads are savage, cruel, and treacherous, the settled Koriak is a contented, cheerful being, always glad to see strangers, and, though not so civilized, as hospitable in his way as the Kamchatdale. The settled Koriaks, like the latter, gain their livelihood by fishing, while the nomad's life is occupied with hunting and his flocks of reindeer. The dwelling of the settled Koriak is

comfortable enough, and is built of wood in the shape of an X, fifteen to twenty feet high. The entry is by clambering up a pole on the outside and dropping through a hole in the top (in the centre of the X), which serves for door, window, and chimney, there being no other egress. The tents of the nomad Koriaks are of reindeer skin, and much smaller, but in neither can a European stay more than a few moments, the smoke and stench being intolerable to any but a Koriak's eyes and stomach. Drunkenness among the Koriaks is rarer than among the Kamchatdales, for the good reason that they cannot get drink. A mushroom or fungus, however, found in the north-east portion of their territory, makes an admirable substitute. Happily, it is rare, for a mouthful of it produces intoxication for three or four days. Although the wandering Koriaks treat their animals with kindness, their cruelty to women is proverbial. Unlike the Kamchatdales and their nearer neighbours, they are extremely jealous, and very often kill their wives on a mere suspicion of infidelity, the more often that they have a right to slay them if really guilty. No Koriak's wife is ever permitted by her lord to beautify herself,

or even wash, for fear of attracting the notice of others. To make assurance doubly sure these northern Othellos, from time to time, compel their wretched women to cover their entire bodies with a thick coating of rancid oil, which effectually keeps even the most amorous lover at a safe distance. When the Koriaks, male or female, become old and unfit for work, they are killed by their family, being allowed the privilege of choosing whether they shall be stoned to death, or have their throats cut. Part of a Koriak youth's education is learning to give the *coup de grâce* as painlessly as possible.

The Kuriles, as I have said, inhabit the small islands of that name south of Cape Lopatka. They are essentially fishermen, their clothes, tents, and even boots being made of fish-skin. I saw, in the museum at Irkoutsk, a long cloak made by them of this material as light and thin as goldbeater's-skin, and absolutely waterproof. The framework of their canoes is of wood, with this fabric four or five thicknesses tightly stretched across it, and these apparently fragile craft will live in the roughest sea, the crew looking, a short distance off, as if they were sitting on the water, so low is the gunwale. The Kuriles have become more civilized since the ceding

of their islands to Japan, though they still preserve queer customs with regard to their women. When a Kurile has proved his wife faithless, he does not, like the Koriak, visit it on her, but on the seducer, whom he is bound to challenge to mortal combat. The weapons are thick cudgels, the challenger first receiving three blows on the head or bare back from his opponent. It is then the turn of the latter, and so they go on till one of the combatants dies of his injuries, the duels sometimes lasting an hour. When a Kurile woman gives birth to twins, one is slain by the father as a sacrifice to the spirits.

There is plenty of wild fowl in Kamchatka, and the country abounds with geese, duck, and snipe at the proper seasons. It is probably the only country in the world where the real wild dog exists. These are found on the mountains, are of a buff or grey colour, the size of a huge mastiff, and very fierce, so much so that natives have been killed when attempting to capture them for purposes of sleighing. They are fed (in their civilized state) on fish, and, the rivers of Kamchatka teeming with salmon, do not have any difficulty in procuring a meal whenever they want it, merely walking

into the stream, and seizing their prey with their teeth.

To the north of Kamchatka is the Chukchee coast, which extends from Chanskaia Bay round Behring's Peninsula to the river Anadyr. This region is inhabited by the Chukchee tribe—a race of men very similar to the wandering Koriaks—who live a nomadic life in tents made of reindeer skins, for here the reindeer roam about in thousands. This part of Siberia also swarms with lemmings, a species of large rat. At times these loathsome creatures migrate in myriads, and woe to the luckless traveller that meets a swarm, for nothing will turn them aside. Rivers and lakes are crossed, even arms of the sea, and should they meet a native in the open country, they will not deviate an inch from their line, swarming up his legs and body and one side to clamber down his back on the other. If not attacked, they are harmless enough, though it must be a severe strain on the patience to have to wait till an army of the brutes has passed over one, an operation which sometimes lasts a couple of hours! The white Polar bear is also found in the Chukchee country. The language of the Kamchatdales, Koriaks, and

Chukchees is a harsh, guttural one, and almost synonymous.

We now come to the Yakouts, or aborigines of Yakoutsk—the largest province in Siberia, which extends from south of the town of Yakoutsk to the mouth of the Lena River in the Frozen Ocean, and is nearly the size of the whole of Europe—Russia excepted. The total population of this huge province is under two hundred and thirty thousand, consisting of Russians, Tungouses, Yukagirs, and Yakouts.

Perhaps with the exception of Yakoutsk and Sakhalien, the town or village of Okhotsk, situated on the sea of that name, is the most utterly desolate place in the whole of Siberia. Its population in 1810 numbered only one hundred and fifty, and these existed solely by trading in furs and fish with the nearest settlements. Okhotsk may literally be called the end of the world. Not a tree or blade of grass is visible within miles of the wretched huts and two or three wooden officials'-houses that constitute the colony. The summer at Okhotsk consists of three fifths of damp and chilly weather, which is succeeded by nine months of cold as raw as it is intense. The [illegible] of the inhabitants is fish, nothing but fish, of

which they certainly have a large and varied choice, for there are at least fourteen varieties of salmon found here. From the absence of fresh vegetables, however, scurvy rages in winter. To the south of Okhotzk lies the island of Sakhalien. The climate is even worse here than at Okhotzk. In July, the hottest month of the year, the thermometer seldom if ever rises above 60° F., while in January it never exceeds 14° F. Scarcely two days together ever pass without rain, followed by dense fogs. The sun is seldom seen, and never felt. It will be a bad day for prisoners when exile to Siberia is abolished, and all convicts are sent direct to Sakhalien by sea.

The town of Yakoutsk has a population of under five thousand, many of whom are political exiles, and, saving Kara and Sakhalien, there are few places more dreaded by prisoners throughout Siberia than this desolate city, which is over five thousand miles from Petersburg! It has, too, the unenviable notoriety of being the hottest place in summer, and the coldest in winter in the world, while in the former season people have been known to die from the effects of mosquito bites, from dense swarms of which the inhabitants are never free in summer for a moment, night or day. Most of the buildings in Yakoutsk are

of wood, though there is a handsome stone cathedral, and the Governor's house is of the same material. The town presents a queer patchwork appearance, the more solidly built mission-houses being mixed up pell-mell with the winter dwellings of the Yakouts, who mix freely with the European population. It is rare to meet a Yakout out of his own province, though I came across two or three as far south as Ziminskaia, near Irkoutsk. They are smallish men, of light copper colour, with black, close-cropped hair, and are a genial, hospitable race. Although robust and capable of going through great fatigue and privation, the majority are timid, not to say cowardly, in disposition, though as hunters they are unsurpassed, and from Yakoutsk are exported the most valuable furs in Siberia. A great number of the latter are sent to China, but the majority find their way to Moscow and Petersburg.

Life must be dreary indeed to the wretched exiles sent to Yakoutsk, where in winter there is only daylight for four hours out of the twenty-four! The winter dwellings of the Yakouts are made of logs protected by banks of earth, which reach to the windows—which latter are made of blocks of solid ice; and an idea of the temperature may be

formed by the fact that, notwithstanding the heat inside the building, these seldom melt till the return of spring. Human beings, cows, calves, and even reindeer, all live together inside these tents for the sake of warmth. In summer the tents are of birch bark and reindeer skin, of the same shape, but naturally much cooler than the winter quarters.

The Yakouts, unlike most of the aboriginal Siberian tribes, are cleanly enough in their habits. They may be said to live literally on reindeer, for the latter is their beast of burthen, and provides them with food, covering, and drink. A species of fermented liquor which they concoct from its milk is even more intoxicating than the "airak" of the Mongols. Reindeer flesh is, however, only eaten among them on great occasions, or when an animal dies from natural causes, the staple food being a sort of cake made of fir-tree bark powdered very fine, and reindeer milk. I saw one at the Irkoutsk museum, which, though four or five years old, still reeked of turpentine, and must, when fresh from the oven, have been somewhat trying even to the gastric juices of a Yakout.

Though a Yakout has few vices but gluttony, he is, like all Siberian races, a sad drunkard when he

gets the chance. They are, however, as a rule, a clever, intelligent race. A Russian we met at Tomsk, had spent many years among them in exile. Being in want of a fork, he commissioned some Yakouts to make him one of wood, at the same time giving them a silver one as a model. What was his surprise when, a fortnight later, they brought him a perfect copy of his own model made of iron, with one exception; the handle of the model was of ebony. To get over this difficulty, they held the handle of the iron fork in wood-smoke till it had attained a dirty grey colour!

With the exception of small-pox, epidemics are rare in Yakoutsk, though the former disease sometimes lays whole settlements waste. It is a common thing for Russian fur-traders to come upon a Yakout village deserted by every living being but dogs and reindeer, while the corpses of those who have succumbed to this loathsome disease lie rotting above ground. When a Yakout is attacked, his companions desert him, leaving a cup of water and a bundle of firewood within his reach; and this, curiously enough, is the practice of many of the inland tribes in Borneo. Indeed, in appearance

and customs the Yakout strikingly resembles the Dyak.

The Chaman religion, though dying out among the more civilized Bouriattes, is still practised to a large extent among the Yakouts. But very few Europeans have ever beheld the strange, weird ceremonies performed by these Chamans, who worship a deity supposed to inhabit the sun. Their rites are held in secret either in the depths of the forest, or the solitude of the "Toundras," vast desert marshes; for none but the true Christian religion is recognized by the Czar's government. A Russian fur-trader who witnessed, in hiding, a ne of their ceremonies a few years ago, thus desc es the scene:— t

"The officiating priest appears as soon as a select body of worshippers is ready, and enters a circle of flaming logs which has been kindled in readiness. He is clad entirely in white. Round his neck is slung a large circular brass plate, signifying the sun, while from his shoulders, sides, and thighs hang innumerable bells and the stuffed bodies of stoats, weasels, seals, and other wild animals. Fitting closely to him is a kind of light framework typifying the human body (I saw one of these at

Irkoutsk), a perfect iron skeleton, showing the ribs, breast-bone, thighs, legs, &c. Sacrifices of reindeer and calves' flesh, fish, airak, sable furs, &c., are then cast into the flames while he turns slowly round and round inside the ring of fire, till, like a Cairo dervish, he has worked himself into a kind of mad frenzy. He then falls helpless in a fit of exhaustion, brought on by excitement and exertion." This ends the ceremony, which no one has ever succeeded in getting at the meaning of.

The "Tungouses" inhabiting the region to the north and east of Yakoutsk, are perhaps the wildest, as they are the filthiest, of any Siberian tribe. They are comparatively few (at most some four thousand), and are yearly diminishing in number. They profess no religion, are nomads, and gain a living by fishing and selling furs to Russian traders, who, by the aid of vodka and debauchery, are slowly but surely decimating them. The dwellings of the Tungouses are the same summer and winter, and are made of reindeer skins stretched tightly over a light wooden framework. It is somewhat curious to note that the tents of all these tribes are of different shapes, that of the Yakouts being square, the Bouriattes

round, and the Koriaks and Kamchatdales triangular, and the Tungouses conical. The latter, though the dirtiest, are the most picturesquely dressed of any; some of their costumes of fur and birdskins being especially graceful and handsome.

The Yurakis, Samoyedes, and Ostiaks are so analogous to the two last-mentioned races as to need no description, though the latter are the race of which, on the Great Obi River, we saw the most. I have touched upon the least civilized races of Siberia, and will now conclude with a few remarks on the link between the civilized Siberian and the aborigines of this great country—the Bouriatte.

The Bouriattes may be said to form the greater part of the population of Irkoutsk, and are treated almost as equals by the Russian Siberian (the offspring of the convict population), who are gradually colonizing this part of Asia. Though as wild and uncivilized as the Yakouts one hundred years ago, the Bouriatte is now Russianized, has given up his old religion of "Chamanism," dresses in European costume, and performs the duties of yemstchik, post-house clerk, policeman, and other Government officials so efficiently, that he is preferred

by some, in these menial capacities, to the European Russian. The Bouriattes originally came from the region north of the Trans-Baikal region, known as Trans-Baikalia, on the eastern shores of Lake Baikal. They are now, however, to be found in almost any part of Siberia on the great post-road from Irkoutsk to Tomsk. Many, too, have amassed large fortunes as gold-diggers. This race differs but little in physiognomy from the Mongol Tartar. They are thrifty, industrious people, and ordinarily of an honest, hospitable disposition, though civilization has already begun to do its work, and they are becoming somewhat unscrupulous in their love of filthy lucre.

The Bouriattes number some two hundred and seventy thousand, and are the most populous aboriginal tribe that exists in Eastern Siberia. Their language is a kind of patois, composed of Mongol and Chinese, in which, oddly enough, a few Turkish words occasionally crop up. How the latter language ever drifted here is a mystery, but some of the words are precisely similar in meaning and expression. Like their neighbours, the Mongols, the Bouriattes are Buddhists, al-

though some very few have remained Chamans (their old and primitive religion), and fewer still are Christians. European missionaries find the conversion of Chaman Bouriattes tolerably easy, that of Buddhists impossible. About every fourth Bouriatte becomes a Lama, and takes vows of celibacy. One of the Buddhist laws precludes a Lama from killing anything, be it only a flea; and I have seen the poor fellows writhing under the torture inflicted by vermin, but suffering in silence, till some friend in need has come up and annihilated their tormentors.

Such is a brief sketch of the aboriginal tribes of Siberia, a people I have passed over lightly, we saw little or nothing of them during our transit through Siberia, and I wish to present that country to the reader exactly as I saw it. Siberia is now almost as much the "land of the stranger" as Australia, and it is more than probable that less than a century hence, the aboriginal tribes of Eastern Siberia will, with the exception of the Russianized Bouriatte, have disappeared altogether from the face of the earth.

We now set about making preparations for the journey to Tomsk. Our tarantass was again

overhauled, a very necessary proceeding after our rough journey through Trans-Baikalia, or what we then thought rough. It was a mere trifle to what was in store for us. Embarking on a journey in Siberia means a preparation of at least three days. One cannot, as in England, pack up a portmanteau and be off at a few hours' notice. There is firstly the permission of the police required to enable one to leave a town or city at all, secondly that most important item in Siberian travel, horses, and thirdly a document authorizing the holder to procure them. This is called the "Podarojna," and is of two kinds.

The "Kasiomné" or Imperial Podarojna is used only by Government officials of all classes, who, though they pay nothing for horses, are always served first at a post-station, even though the luckless holder of a privatne or second-class podarojna, may have been waiting for his two or three days. We found this to our cost on several occasions, notably on one, where, though our horses were already harnessed, and we were about to start, a Government engineer dashed up, and producing his kasiomné, had them taken away from us and proceeded calmly on his way, leaving us to curse him

and our fate, and wait another twenty-four hours. In urgent cases, such as an imperial messenger with despatches from Moscow or Petersburg, the kasiomné is written in red ink, and marked "Courier," when, though there may be no horses available in the station, the inhabitants of the village are bound to provide them.

The ordinary podarojna is called the "Privatne," and costs twenty-five roubles. This entitles the holder to horses at any station where they may be available, but they must always be taken out and handed over to the fortunate possessor of a first-class podarojna, should the latter make his appearance before the tarantass has actually started. To obviate this difficulty a private company has lately been started at all the stations on the Great Post-Road, to provide the holders of second-class podarojnas with horses. They charge exorbitant fares, however, and we always preferred to wait even two or three days for the regular Government horses. In some cases we found that the Government postmaster and manager of the private company were in league to rob travellers.

Provisions also had to be thought of, and those of the most portable kind—sardines, Liebig's Extract, a

small chest of tea, sugar, and half a dozen pots of jam constituted our commissariat department, together with two bottles of cognac, and half a dozen flasks of vodka, for with the exception of milk, black bread, and eggs, nothing is to be got as a rule at the post-stations. We invariably found a menu with prices affixed on the walls of every waiting-room, even in the smallest villages, but on inquiry, the tempting list of cutlets, beef-steak, &c., &c., usually dwindled down to the homely but unappetizing egg and black bread! Indeed, with the exception of Krasnoiarsk, Nijni-Udinsk, and Kansk, this constituted our sole fare from Irkoutsk to Tomsk, with one exception, where, delayed for a couple of days at Sonkovskaya, we were regaled with a basin of broth at the village ostrog, or prison. I think that plate of soup did more towards dispelling any wild notions I may have had anent the ill-treatment of Siberian exiles than pages of writing! Many a time, when delayed on the road, have I smelt the savoury fumes from the ostrog cook-house with envy, as I slunk back disgusted to my stale egg and black bread at the post-house. Sad though their lot undoubtedly is, the Siberian convicts are not only well clad, but con-

siderably better fed than our own criminals in England. Be it understood that I speak of criminals, and not political prisoners or nihilists, to whom, notwithstanding all that ardent Russophiles may say, Siberia is a veritable hell upon earth. The Russian "criminal" is exiled to colonize, the Russian "nihilist" (in most cases) to die.

Personally, I would very much sooner undergo a term of imprisonment for a criminal offence in Siberia than in England. The work in summer is undoubtedly harder, but during the winter months, when mining is suspended, convicts at Irkoutsk are employed for the most part in cigarette-making, or work of a similar light nature, while they are treated with more laxity, and enjoy far more liberty, than in our convict-prisons at home. Smoking is not forbidden, card-playing and other games allowed, and free conversation, for in Siberia solitary confinement among criminals is unknown, while, as a rule, their friends, if they have any in the neighbourhood, are permitted to see them once a month, and on these occasions are allowed to bring the prisoner tobacco, food, and any other luxuries, excepting alcoholic liquors. Even in this respect, however, the rules are by no means stringent.

A SIBERIAN CRIMINAL CONVICT.

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I am now writing of what came under my own personal observation at Irkoutsk and Tomsk, for save on one or two occasions we were never allowed to enter a village ostrog, nor at any time to exchange words with political prisoners while in confinement. As, however, a considerable portion of the population at Irkoutsk consisted of political exiles living under police surveillance, I was able to gather some interesting details from this class relative to their life while in prison and at the mines, which soon convinced me that even a murderer is better off in Siberia than the writer of a so-called offensive political article, in a Petersburg or Moscow journal, or the enthusiastic student who has too openly expressed his views on the great social question. Where the criminal is allowed to mix freely with his fellows and receive his friends, the "political" is kept in solitary confinement, forbidden not only to address his warders, but also, which is a far greater punishment, deprived of the use of books, pens, ink, and paper. Smoking is also in his case strictly tabooed, and any food but that specially laid down by prison rules. And if the men are harshly treated, let the reader imagine the torture it must mean to women of refinement and education who have been ac-

customed to the comforts of civilized life, to be suddenly thrust into the midst, if not the company, of a gang of murderers, thieves, and vagabonds. I met, while at Irkoutsk, one of the female political exiles whose portrait appears in these pages (but whose name I suppress for obvious reasons), and heard from her own lips the outrages and indignities which she had been subjected to by her guards on the long ten months' march from Tomsk to Nertchinsk. Her life, she said, had indeed been a hell. It was only on arrival at the mines that she got comparative rest, for though the work was harder, it was preferable to the society of the brutes who had persecuted her during the long, last summer marches. She is now at Irkoutsk for life, and with the exception of daily reporting herself at the police registry, is a free woman, so long as she keeps to a radius of ten miles of that city. But although barely five and twenty, the march and two years at the mines have turned her once auburn hair snow white.

There are, no doubt, those who richly merit their fate. Vera Anitchkoff, for instance, who will never leave the mines again. The prisoner depicted in prison dress is Count ——, a Polish

nobleman, who not ten years ago had a hotel in Paris, a villa at Cannes, and who, stoic and brave fellow as he is, remarked that he would not mind so much had they not given him "*cette coiffure ridicule!*" The French journalist, M.D., was one of the most prominent members of the Paris commune, and is certainly well out of the way, for a more desperate and dangerous character never harangued a mob from the barricades. There are at least a dozen communists in various parts of Siberia, who, escaping from France in 1870, have made their way to Petersburg and other Russian cities, only to get into fresh trouble and receive their quietus in the gold-mines of Trans-Baikal and forests of Sakhalin. We, however, saw but two, M.D. and our friend the Pole, on the shores of Baikal. The other two portraits represented are criminal types, one that of a man, a native of Nijni Novgorod, who had murdered his mother and two sisters. On being asked why he had committed the murders, he replied, "Oh, I was sick of my family, and wanted to go to Siberia. There is money to be made there, and I could not afford to go at my own expense!" And such men as this are to be the pioneers and colonizers of Asiatic Russia! for no criminal, however bad, ever

goes to Siberia without a notion that one day, sooner or later, he will obtain his ticket of leave, and with it a house, a piece of ground, and a sum of money to start him in life. No wonder that most of the gangs we met on the road were composed of cheery, happy-go-lucky fellows, chaffing their guards, singing, smoking, and laughing, a striking contrast to the dozen or so of wretched men and women in plain clothes jolting along the rough road in tumbrils behind them, some of the women pale, delicate-looking creatures with a baby at the breast, who looked as if death, and not the gloomy prison-gates of Irkoutsk or Kárá, would end their journey.

It is not, I imagine, generally know that a political exile is divorced from wife or husband the day that the Ourals are crossed from Europe into Asia. This is voluntary on the part of the man or woman; but, as may be imagined, the law is frequently abused. "My wife is guilty of conspiring against the Government," says the henpecked husband, or, "My husband has compromising papers in his possession: search the house," says the wife, who is jealous or has transferred her affections, and the thing is done. There is no delay in such cases. A couple of hours settles the matter

one way or another. The accused is not tried publicly, nor is he allowed to plead or call witnesses for the defence. This is called in Russia, "Exile by administrative process." Within a week of the denunciation the victim is over the border, the marriage dissolved. Such cases are, however, rare. Russian ladies, to their honour be it said, accompany as a rule their husbands into exile, little knowing, however, the hardships and dangers before them; little dreaming of the insults which, though free, they will have to put up with *en route*, under the very eyes of the husband powerless to help them. As for the unmarried women (politicals) that are sent to the mines alone, their end is pretty much the same as a rule. Their two or five years of prison over, they are allowed to settle down in Tomsk or Irkoutsk. If possessed of private means (as many are), they are allowed to enjoy their income. Is it not for the benefit of Siberia? Many take to trade, become dressmakers, confectioners, milliners, &c., &c.; but the majority, if young and pretty, take up a more lucrative though less respectable profession. Some of the latter class almost vie with the "Demi-Mondaines" of Paris or Vienna in their extravagance and the splendour of their

houses, carriages, and diamonds. Every liberty is allowed them, save, as I have said, the trifling inconvenience of the registry of their names every morning at eleven at the police office, and the somewhat uncomfortable feeling of not being able to drive or ride more than ten miles out of Irkoutsk, or whatever town they may be located in. I dined on one occasion with one of these ladies, and one could scarcely realize that the clever and pretty hostess who entertained us, dressed in the height of Parisian fashion, and who, after dinner, charmed us with her rendering of Beethoven and Mendelssohn, had, but six short months before, been sifting gold and washing prisoners' clothes at the gold-mines of Nertchinsk!

One hears little of Nihilism in Irkoutsk. It is a sealed subject, and, except on rare occasions, never broached. Here, as throughout Siberia, however, we took care not to mix in any political discussions, a piece of advice I would tender to any one intending to make this journey. Russians, and especially Siberians, are quick to take offence, and on one occasion we were nearly being embroiled, though quite innocently, in a serious "Fracas."

It was in a café on the outskirts of the town.

In every public room, be it post-house, hotel, restaurant, or government office, there is a portrait of His Majesty the Czar, flanked in a corner by the "Ikona," or Sacred Image. Ignorant of the custom of the country, Lancaster and I one evening entered one of these places without removing our hats. The room was crowded, for it was a public holiday, and all were more or less under the influence of copious libations of vodka and other drinks they had imbibed during the day. Seating ourselves at a small table in their midst, I was not a little surprised to feel, the moment after, a violent blow at the back of my head, and at the same moment to see my hat whizzing through the air to the other side of the "Salle." We were both armed, but luckily for ourselves had the presence of mind to keep our revolvers in our pockets. Had they been produced, I doubt if either of us would have left the place alive. Fortunately the owner of the café spoke French, and apologizing for the conduct of his guests, explained that the sole cause of their annoyance was that we had omitted to doff our hats to the Czar's picture. The affair was soon settled,

for the gentleman who had assaulted us came up and profusely apologized for his conduct in not knowing that we were unacquainted with the customs of the country! There must have been fifty or sixty Siberians (all more or less drunk) in the place. Had there been a third that number, or even half, I should have felt sorely tempted to go for the swaggering bully, who was meek enough when, peace being restored, we showed him our newest patent in American "six-shooters."

The Irkoutsk police is utterly inadequate to the size of the city. Any one creating a disturbance at night is not, as in London and other European cities, incarcerated for the night and brought before the magistrate in the morning. That worthy, in Irkoutsk, sits up all night, and disposes of cases summarily by fine or imprisonment as may be necessary. A somewhat amusing incident happened while we were there, showing the manner in which these gentlemen administer justice. Half a dozen young men, who had dined not wisely but too well, were returning homewards, when they encountered a decrepit old man, whom, by way of a joke, they fell upon, and nearly beat to death. The police patrol happening

to pass at the moment, two of these spirited youths were taken into custody, the remainder managed to escape. On arrival at the police station, one of the offenders discovered an old acquaintance in the inspector, who, however, declined to allow the bond of friendship to interfere with his stern sense of duty. "I must fine you Rs. 50 each," said the Siberian Nupkins, "but as we are old friends, you shall pay it to me, and we will drink it in champagne. How we shall get the laugh over those idiots who ran away!" History does not state whether the old man died. He was still in hospital when we left. Such is magisterial justice in Siberia!

The morality of Irkoutsk is, as I have said, at an exceedingly low ebb. Our Danish friend Madame R., was on her arrival called upon by a young and handsome woman, beautifully dressed, with whom in less than a week she had struck up a violent friendship, for both had tastes in common, and were fond of music and art. A few days afterwards, Madame R., to her great delight, found another friend, the Baroness Podorski, who had spent many months at Copenhagen. But it was somewhat disappointing, said Madame R., to find

soon after, that the baroness had done five years at the mines for murdering her niece, a rich heiress, by slow poison at Moscow, and was now living on the proceeds as a queen of society at Irkoutsk. Calling to see her other friend one afternoon, Madame R. found her gone. "It is sad," said her host, "but we have quarrelled, and she has gone to live with B——, of the Cossacks. You know we were not married." The state of things in the country is little better. When a peasant is about to be married, he lives in a state of single blessedness with his fiancée for six months. If at the end of that period she is found to be *enceinte*, the wedding takes place, if not, they separate and form new liaisons. But this custom exists only in Siberia, and even there is gradually dying out in the more civilized districts.

One morning, about five days before our departure, we were seated at breakfast, when a stout and portly old gentleman was shown in. The stranger must have weighed at least sixteen stone, and was broad in proportion. After a deal of palaver, we elicited that this good gentleman desired to become our fellow-traveller as far as Tomsk, proposed in other words to use

our tarantass, eat our provisions, and do the journey for exactly a third the amount it would otherwise have cost him. In vain we pointed out that our vehicle was already full, that there was no room for a third. "No matter," he said, smiling blandly, "I will lie between you." The prospect of arriving at Tomsk as flat as a pancake, to say nothing of being asphyxiated by the fumes of garlic and tobacco, were too much, and we therefore intimated to our visitor politely but firmly that we declined his company. He, however, as firmly declined to take a refusal or leave our room till about 5 p.m., having sat in a chair and watched our every movement for three mortal hours without uttering a syllable. We had at last to ring the bell and insist on his being shown out. "Then you will not take me?" he said with a sigh. "Ah! you are wrong. Read that. I will call again to-morrow," and leaving a slip of paper on the table, he slowly left the room.

Translation from the *Irkoutsk Gazette* of July 7th, 1887:—

"The roads between Tomsk and Irkoutsk are infested with runaway convicts, so that travelling in this region, especially at night, is extremely

dangerous. Lately, a whole family was murdered at the distance of a few versts from Irkoutsk, and we hear of such cases frequently enough."

So ran the paper. I did not at first pay much heed to what I imagined was a scheme of our fat friend to make us take him as an additional protection. It was not pleasant news, though; so I took it to R——, who, good Russian scholar, would be able to enlighten us as to whether it ever *had* appeared in the Irkoutsk paper. The file was soon found, and somewhat to my disappointment, the paragraph in black and white, with an additional piece of advice from the Police Department not to travel on the Great Post-Road, except urgent cases, at night.

Our fat friend called again next day, but we were obdurate. "Ah! you will be sorry for it, my friends," he said. "This," producing a horse pistol, apparently some centuries old, "this would have been no mean help in a skirmish. News has come to-day by telegraph that a party of merchants have been attacked by escaped convicts near Krasnoiarsk, two killed and the others severely maltreated and robbed. Well, good-day, and may you reach Tomsk alive."

We found on inquiry that the roads, so far as robbers were concerned, were in a highly dangerous state. Nor was this the only difficulty with which we had to contend. Heavy rains had flooded the country and made it almost impassable between Nijni Udinsk, and Kansk, a couple of hundred versts from Irkoutsk. Of this we had practical proof, for the last mail from Petersburg had been delayed five days. We hoped, all being well, to make Moscow by the 1st of October; but in no country, as far as travel is concerned, is the old proverb so clearly demonstrated of "Homme propose, et Dieu dispose," as in Siberia. If by any chance we were detained in Eastern Siberia till after the 1st of October, we should have to wait at Tomsk for the snow to set, and sleigh on to Nijni Novgorod, not a pleasant prospect. We had seen quite enough of a Siberian city to know that a residence therein of a week or ten days is more than enough. Irkoutsk, the R.'s said, was far pleasanter in every way than Tomsk, a circumstance that made us all the more dread an enforced residence of two, or perhaps three, months in the latter city, in the worst season of the year—autumn.

We were luckily well armed, and took pains to

show it to the servants of the hotel, for in nine cases out of ten the latter and the yemstchiks (or drivers) are in league with the thieves, who rarely attack in the day-time, which was a comfort. Still the prospect of a journey of over a thousand miles through a country infested with bandits and vagabonds did not sound cheering, especially as, in the case of the murdered family, the robbers were armed with revolvers. On the latter occasion, when a man, his wife, and two children had been killed, the yemstchik alone had escaped, which fact, significant as it seemed, did not induce the authorities to detain or even examine him. The murders had taken place at Tiret skaya, a lonely village about sixty versts from Irkoutsk. We were furnished before starting with a small printed guide at the Irkoutsk station, whereon were marked, by black stars, the stages most infested by foot-pads. Beyond Nijni Udinsk, or about a hundred and twenty versts from Irkoutsk, the roads were practically safe.

We now had but two things to purchase, literature and furs. We commenced by ransacking the book-shops, but, alas! found nothing but the works of Jules Verne, with an occasional book of Zola's. English books there were absolutely none, but of

German works, ancient and modern, there was no lack. The latter, however, were no use to us, and we were forced to be content with a copy of Jules Verne's "Voyage dans la Lune," "Michel Strogoff," by the same author, and Zola's "Assommoir." I verily believe I could say any of the three off by heart, for we got no other books till we reached Nijni Novgorod. I do not know what I should have done without Reiff's Russian Grammar and Dictionary, with the help of which I managed to scrape up a little Russian, which on more than one occasion stood me in good stead. Contrary to general belief, a superficial knowledge of this language is very soon learnt. In less than a month I was able to converse fairly well, and ask for what I wanted, though I cannot vouch for my grammar.

Furs were the next consideration, and I was surprised to find how dear they were; but the fact that all, even the commonest, have to be sent to Moscow to be cured and made up, explained this. A pelisse of the cheapest kind, reindeer skin outside and sea-bear in, cost me nearly 22*l.*, and then R—— told me that I had not paid too dear. The same skins unmade would have cost about 12*l.* My friend the Polish barman

attempted to dissuade me from buying one at all, saying we should find fur clothes useless, the weather would be so hot, but I was very glad of my "dacha" and seal cap on more than one occasion before we got to Tomsk. The most costly fur procurable in Siberia is the silver fox, or rather the paws of that animal. No *comme-il-faut* person ever thinks of wearing any other part, for the whole skin is only worth one-tenth part of one of the tiny, velvety paws. The next in value is the beaver, then the sable, the marten, and astrakan, the last being bear, elk, and reindeer, which latter are, however, only worn by the lower orders.

A great Russian speculator, M. Sib akoff, arrived at the Moskovskaya the evenin t before we left. I heard with regret that he had left early next morning for Nicolaiefsk, for I was most anxious to see the individual who may be called the Rothschild and Lesseps of Siberia. No enterprise of any magnitude is ever attempted without first consulting and, if possible, obtaining M. Siberakoff's name on the board of directors, and his last venture may indeed be called a leviathan one—establishing a waterway between Petersburg and Irkoutsk. How many million rou-

bles this will cost I should be afraid to say, but it is a private speculation, and undertaken solely at M. Siberakoff's cost. The idea was first started by the difficulty and annoyance created by constantly changing goods, tea, silk, &c., from boats on to caravan carts on the Great Post-Road. A water-way, thought Siberakoff, would obviate all this. There was but one way of doing it: to join the Obi river with the Gulf of Archangel, one great drawback to this being that Burroughes Straits, in the Frozen Ocean, through which vessels would have to pass, is hardly ever free from ice. To obviate this difficulty, Siberakoff cut a canal from the River Petchora to Obdorsk, on the Obi river. The magnitude of the under-taking may be estimated when I say that this had to be cut through the Oural Mountains. From Obdorsk Siberakoff's boats will descend the Obi river as far as Piatko, where they will enter the Chulim river, a small tributary of the Obi. From here another canal has been cut into the Yenisei river. From this point they will go north again till the junction of the Angara and Yenisei is reached, and thence they will descend the former stream to Irkoutsk. The work is now nearly completed, and we saw at

Tiumen two of the small steamers destined for the towing of barges. There will thus be (in summer) an unbroken waterway between the Baltic and Lake Baikal.

It is certainly hard on the promoter of this scheme, that since all this has been carried out, surveys for a railway between Tomsk and Irkoutsk have been made by the Russian Government, indeed the work has already been commenced, and will be completed, it is confidently expected, by the end of 1889. It will then be possible to go from Petersburg to Pekin overland in under two months, though the Great Gobi Desert must always remain a stumbling-block to entirely connecting the capitals of Russia and China by railway. This part of the journey will always have to be made, as at present, with camels or horses, for the very good reason that two most important things—fuel and water—are lacking throughout Mongolia. The canal, however, will probably be carried on as far as Khabarofka, and the voyage thence to Pekin be made by aid of steamers now running on the River Amoor as far as Nicolaiefsk, and thence by ocean steamer to Tientsin. The question of a railway from Irkoutsk to Tomsk

has often been mooted within the past ten years, but never till the present time with any practical result. Six years since, an American firm offered to build one the whole distance, from Wladivostok, on the Sea of Japan, to Tomsk, in Central Siberia. Their conditions were a lease of 99 years, and a free grant from Government of fifty versts on each side of the rail the whole distance. As the line would have passed through districts teeming with gold and platinum, the offer was declined. The line will now be a purely Government affair, is being constructed almost entirely by soldiers, and engineered by the same officials who lately superintended the construction of the Trans-Caspian Railway.

At length, on the 23rd of August, our final preparations were completed, and we now only needed the permission of the Inspector of police to embark upon our journey. In this we were singularly lucky, receiving it two days after application, though not before a police agent had called and thoroughly searched our boxes and effects. "You are taking no letters, I trust," said the official suspiciously. "I presume you know the penalty of being found in the Czar's

dominions with compromising papers, no matter what your nationality." I assured him that no being existed more loyal than myself to his Imperial master, mentally thanking Providence at the same time that I had not acceded to the prayer of my dirty friend with the letter for Greek Street, Soho.

Our good friends the R——s insisted on entertaining us to a dinner in honour of our departure the night before we left, a banquet in which the chef of the "Moskovskaya" excelled himself, and to which we did ample justice. Poor little Madame R—— alone cast a gloom over the entertainment by her sad face, and indeed considering she was doomed to two years' exile in Irkoutsk, it was not to be wondered at. After dinner we adjourned to the opera, where the poor little woman forgot her troubles in the pretty, sparkling music of "La Grande Duchesse" and the antics of a wonderfully well acted Fritz. It was difficult to imagine oneself in this far-away corner of the earth. The large, brightly-lit theatre, gold and crimson boxes, and stalls, crowded with well-dressed men and women, were different, indeed, from one's preconceived notions of the capital of Eastern

Siberia, as gleaned from "Called Back," and works of a similar nature. R—— insisted on our supping after the play, and it was daylight ere we sought our couch, the last soft bed we were destined to enjoy for many days to come.

We found a telegram that evening on our return to the hotel, announcing the murder of Stanley, the African explorer, and the whole of the expedition under his command. The report seemed to cause as much excitement in Irkoutsk as if war had broken out between England and Russia, though what possible interest the Eastern Siberian could have in Central Africa puzzled me. The telegram coming from Petersburg (and not from England), I strongly doubted the news being correct, though it caused me some uneasiness, a great friend forming part of the expedition.[1]

Considering the remote position of Irkoutsk and difficulty of obtaining European stores, &c., we were agreeably surprised at the moderate charges made by our host of the "Moskovskaya." Our bill, including

[1] Mr. J. Jameson, an experienced traveller and naturalist, whose sad death from fever, since these pages were written, has added another honoured name to the list of those who have fallen in the cause of science and civilization in Central Africa.

everything, was only 11*l.* a head, and we by no means stinted ourselves.

All was ready by eleven o'clock the next morning (24th August). A little crowd had assembled in the market-place to witness the strange sight of a couple of Englishmen about to cross Siberia! Madame R—— witnessed the start from the balcony, and her neat little grey-clad figure and pretty face is the last fair vision of the city that I can recall, as having seated ourselves in the tarantass, the yemtschik cracked his whip, the game little horses dashed into their collars, and we rattled away with a loud jangle of bells, past the sunny deserted streets and into the open country. Half an hour later and Irkoutsk, a glittering speck on the dark green horizon, was barely discernible.

CHAPTER X.

IRKOUTSK TO TOMSK.

LET the reader picture the neighbourhood of Aldershot with its undulating pine-clad hills suddenly transplanted into the depths of the black country lying around Newcastle-on-Tyne. For stone buildings let him substitute filthy, tumble-down houses of unpainted wood, almost undistinguishable at a distance from the dark, greasy soil around them. People these villages with dirty, wild-looking men clad in sheepskins and gaudy-coloured rags, and still dirtier, half-naked women. Conceive a sickly smell (peculiar to Asiatic Russia) of old skins, wood, smoke, turpentine, and sewage, and a Siberian landscape is before you. In fine weather a fine grey dust that creeps into your hair, chokes up eyes and nostrils, and renders life almost unbearable; on a wet day thick, greasy, black mud that is everywhere. In the post-house, in the tarantass, there was no keeping it out. I do not know which was

worse—the dust or the mud—perhaps the latter, for it smelt abominably, and stained like ink.

We had looked forward to fine scenery in Siberia, lofty, picturesque ranges, wooded valleys, and glorious panoramas of forest and plain, but were grievously disappointed, for the scenery between Irkoutsk and Tomsk is, with one or two exceptions, intolerably monotonous and depressing. My recollections of that weary journey are neither pleasant nor interesting. Eastern Siberia, as I remember it, is simply one long and varying succession of three colours: Dark green, brown, and yellow—pines, mud, and occasional cornfields. Of the fifty odd villages lying between the capitals of Eastern and Western Siberia, not more than a dozen contained over 400 inhabitants. Save in these villages we saw no signs of life but occasional gangs of prisoners, or a stray tarantass or téléga. The poet's lines—

> "Miles, on miles, on miles, of desolation,
> Leagues, on leagues, on leagues, without a change,"

fitly describe the country through which we travelled for three weeks after leaving Irkoutsk.

A description of one Siberian village will suffice for all. The houses, for the most part of rough un-

painted wood, have an untidy, unfinished appearance, the majority of them being dangerously out of the perpendicular. The effect produced by their appearance was exactly like that of ships rolling and tumbling about in a high sea, some with their sterns high up out of the water, others with their bows buried in the waves. This phenomenon is caused by the depression of the ground in spring, when the snow melts, and when their foundations being very insecure, the houses fall about in all directions. I saw one at Kloutchefskaya, near Kansk, that had sunk to such a degree that the inmates had to enter it on all fours. The entire absence of colour in these villages was fearfully depressing. I do not think I saw a single flower-garden throughout the whole journey. In some of the larger villages faint attempts at decoration were made by cutting down a fir-tree and sticking it (rootless) into the ground on either side of the road; but as this had been done in early summer, the dark green of the firs had usually faded, scorched by the sun into a dirty drab, making the surroundings, if possible, more desolate and cheerless than before. In every Siberian village, however small, are three Government buildings; the church,

prison, and post-house; also, situated at one extremity of the place a huge wooden barn, in which a quantity of grain is stored annually by the villagers as a precaution against famine.

We found the post-houses (which are situated at intervals of every twenty or twenty-five versts) vary considerably in comfort and cleanliness, the best being about on a par with a decently kept labourer's cottage in England. All are built on the same model, and of wood, two black and white pillars at the door, and the Imperial arms over the gateway alone distinguishing this building from the other rough wooden huts. Two rooms, or partitions, each about twenty feet by eighteen feet, are set apart for the use of travellers, a huge brick stove in the wall heating them equally. The floor was invariably carpetless, while the sole furniture consisted of a small table and two hard wooden chairs, sometimes, but not often, an equally hard wooden sofa; and for ornament a few woodcuts from the newspapers, or cheap tawdrily coloured portraits of the Czar and Czarina were pinned on the greasy, whitewashed walls. In one corner on a shelf is kept the "Black Book," a volume in which travellers are invited to write any com-

plaints, immediately over this a gaudy brass "Ikon," or picture of the Holy Virgin or Saviour, which no Russian's room, from Czar to peasant, is ever without. There were usually two windows—double ones—kept hermetically sealed even on the hottest day. Washing appliances were, of course, nil. I should hardly like to own how often I washed my face and hands between Irkoutsk and Tomsk! Ablutions were almost entirely dispensed with except for a handkerchief dipped into a tea-glass from the "Samovar," and passed over the face and hands. With this "lick and a promise," one had to be satisfied. The post-houses differed a good deal in comfort and accommodation, some being as clean and well found as those east of Lake Baikal, others little better than human pig-styes. Curiously enough, the dirtiest were invariably situated near the large towns, and while we met with nothing but civility and kindness from officials in the wilder districts, those within forty versts or so of Tomsk and Irkoutsk were as arrogant and extortionate as only a Siberian post-master can be.

The Great Post-Road from Irkoutsk to Tomsk, would scarcely be called a road in any other country. In wet weather it becomes a morass,

in dry seasons the thick grey dust is up to the axles, while in early autumn the centre track is often so cut up by caravans as to make wheel traffic quite impossible. The yemstchiks then diverge to the right or left, where, though the going is not so heavy, the numerous tree-stumps, watercourses, felled logs, &c., render it anything but safe. I often wondered our tarantass did not come to pieces altogether long before reaching Tomsk. No European carriage would have stood the work twenty-four hours. A triple telegraph wire runs the entire length of the road, and is carried on eastwards from Irkoutsk to Wladivostok, a town of about 2000 inhabitants, and the headquarters of the Russian Naval Squadron in Siberian waters. There is no telegraph direct to Pekin. I was surprised, at times, to miss the wires altogether for twenty or thirty versts but found, on inquiry, that they are sometimes laid under ground on account of the violent storms that sweep across the steppes, chiefly near Krasnoiarsk and Marinsk. Telegraphing in the Russian Empire is cheap enough in all conscience. A message may be sent from Petersburg to Wladivostok for fifteen kopeks, or about 2½*d.* a word; from the capital to all parts of European Russia, for a third of that sum.

We dashed along gaily the first two stages out of Irkoutsk, passing, a few versts out, the monastery of St. Innocent, a huge stone building erected at the cost of many million roubles by the gold-merchants of the capital. This saint is supposed to protect travellers, and none of the wealthier mine-owners ever dream of taking a journey without first making a substantial offering at his shrine. Such voyages are necessarily frequent enough, and the sum total at the end of the year is considerable. It was almost like a glimpse of Italy or Southern France to peep in through the open gateway, the priests in their brown and white robes, strolling bare-headed about the sunny, vine-clad gardens, and shady cloisters. The tower at the eastern side of the building, is lofty, and of graceful architecture, but the fine effect is entirely spoilt by a large sham clock, just beneath the steeple, its painted hands pointing eternally to half-past twelve. The Siberians apparently have a mania for these, for I afterwards noticed them on many public and Government buildings at Tomsk, Krasnoiarsk, and Tobolsk.

We reached Bokovskaya, the first post-station out of Irkoutsk, a little after two o'clock, and were lucky enough to obtain horses at once, a circumstance that

did not then strike one as out of the way, but we had as yet but little experience of Siberian post-masters and their ways. It was getting dusk as we reached the little village of Tielminskaya, where our first check occurred. Though we had covered but little ground, bright sunshine, a comfortable tarantass, and good horses, made our first day's posting so pleasant that we began to think the discomforts of Siberian travel had been exaggerated by our Danish friends. To be sure we had only come thirty versts, and over one thousand five hundred lay between us and the good city of Tomsk!

The waiting-room at Tielminskaya had just been vacated by a Siberian family *en route* for Irkoutsk. Its appearance was, to say the least of it, uninviting, and did not give one a very high opinion of the cleanliness of the Siberian *en voyage*. No horses were obtainable till four o'clock next morning, so we spread our furs and rugs on the floor, resolving to sleep in the waiting-room, filthy as it was. One might, to use a slang expression, have cut the atmosphere with a knife. Though it had been oppressively warm all day, every window was tightly closed, while a huge fire roared in the brick stove.

A NIGHT IN A POST HOUSE.—TILMSKAYA.

The dirty, worm-eaten floor, strewn as it was with mud, straw, scraps of paper, fish-bones, egg-shells, and other abominations, was anything but appetizing to look at, to say nothing of the stench of stale cigarette smoke, furs, and salt fish, but we managed to make a good meal notwithstanding, and thoroughly enjoyed the fresh-laid eggs, clotted cream, and preserved berries that the post-master's wife provided. We little knew then that a time was coming when even eggs and milk would be unobtainable luxuries.

A "Pope" (as priests of the Greek Church are called) made his appearance about ten o'clock, just as we were thinking of turning in—a noisy, bustling fellow, who put further rest out of the question; for he was of a communicative turn of mind, and would talk, whether one answered him or not, so I made the best of a bad job, and got out my dictionary, with a view to picking up a little Russian. The conversation was somewhat laboured, and consisted chiefly of pantomime. Lancaster did not join in, but slumbered away peacefully in a corner. I verily believe he would have slept through an earthquake.

A word constantly made use of by my clerical

friend was *Katorgi*. I do not know whether the reader has ever attempted to look out a Russian word, having but a slight knowledge of the language. If so, it will not surprise him that it took me a considerable time to discover that the word, in English, means "Convicts." By dint of hard work I managed at the end of an hour to glean that, firstly, the road between Koutoulik and Nijni Udinsk was infested with robbers; secondly, that on no account must we travel at night through these districts; and, thirdly, that a whole family on their way to Irkoutsk from Krasnoiarsk had been murdered by thieves (escaped convicts) but a week previously.

This was scarcely encouraging our first day out. Referring to the Posting-book, I found that Koutoulik lay fifty versts further on, which would probably land us there about 2 p.m. the following day, always supposing there was no delay at Maltinskaya or Polovilnaya, the intervening stations. We were well armed, as I took care to show the clerical stranger, who, for all I knew, might himself be in league with the thieves. Siberia makes one very suspicious. At any rate we resolved to travel as little as possible by night, and when

doing so to keep a good look-out, sleeping only one at a time while on the road.

It was past 2 a.m. before the loquacious "Pope" allowed me to snatch a few hours' rest. The wind had now risen, and the rain, which had threatened at intervals through the day, was pouring down in torrents, and rattling against the window-panes with a force that boded ill for our next day's journey. Given fine weather and average luck in obtaining horses, I had not the slightest doubt of being able to reach Tomsk in time for the last steamer to Tiumen, but a week of steady rain would upset all our plans, and probably result in our being kept prisoners at Tomsk through the mists and fogs of early autumn, until the roads set for sleighing. To post through Siberia in October is next to impossible.

We had already been two hours on the road when day broke. By eight o'clock the thick woolly clouds had rolled away, and the sun burst forth clear and cloudless, which soon dried our wet, shivering frames, for the tarantass hood leaked badly, and we had been lying in a pool of water all the morning. About mid-day we sighted the Angara for the last time. The river here presents the

appearance of a vast lake (so broad is the distance from shore to shore), its blue waters fringed with massive rocks and boulders of grey granite, while further inland a fertile plain of hay and corn fields stretched away to where on the horizon a low dark green line marked the recommencement of forest. Men, women, and children, were working in the fields, and it seemed strange to a European eye to see the peasantry gathering the harvest and making hay at the same time. This part of the country teems with game, wild fowl, and a very large species of hare.

Being detained for five hours at Polovilnaya, we did not reach Koutoulik until nine o'clock p.m. The post-house being fairly comfortable, we resolved to sleep here, and make a start at daybreak next day. We had the place to ourselves till about 11 p.m., when a loud cracking of whips and jingling of collar-bells announced a fresh arrival, and one of no little importance, to judge by the bustle and confusion displayed by the yemstchiks.

"The gospodin will perhaps kindly vacate the bed," whispered the old post-master. "It is an officer of high degree and his lady." The "bed" being composed of hard planks and about two feet

broad, I took the floor without demur; for there was little difference; and a few moments after the new arrivals entered the waiting-room, one a tall, handsome man in uniform, his companion a pretty little woman of the true Russian type, with violet eyes and finely cut features.

"You are English, the post-master informs me," said our new acquaintance in French. "Will you do my wife and myself the pleasure of supping with us? I conclude, you, like ourselves, are detained here till to-morrow morning."

I have seldom enjoyed a meal more than that supper in the wilds of Siberia, for, apart from the fact that we had tasted no solid food for two days, our new friends were capital company. Madame had left school in Paris only seven short months before, to marry the gay Cossack, whose military duties called him to the dreary convict settlement of Nertchinsk, in Trans-Baikal. "Un drôle de voyage de noces, n'est-ce pas, messieurs," said he, laughing heartily, while his poor little wife, who looked tired to death, tried hard to screw up a smile at the joke. A good supper and two or three glasses of Kümmel, however, worked wonders, and a merrier party could scarcely be found than we were that night. It was such a

relief to meet a fellow-creature with whom one could converse without racking the brain over Reiff's dictionary and dialogue-book, and we chatted away far into the early hours. While the Cossack enlarged upon Petersburg and its delights to Lancaster, little Madame V. and myself had a long talk over the delights of Paris, the opera, the "Bois," Sara Bernhardt, and a thousand other subjects connected with the beautiful city so far away. She was a bright, plucky little thing, though worn to a shadow, and haggard from constant travel and fatigue. I could not help wondering how long that pretty face and expression would last in dreary, desolate Nertchinsk.

Madame having retired to rest (tucking up on the hard, cushionless sofa in the most matter-of-fact way), Colonel V. did not attempt to conceal his satisfaction at having come unscathed through the Katorgi infested district. "There have been two more murders since the ones you speak of," he said in a low tone, on our telling him of my conversation with the priest at Tielminskaya. "One that of a Jew pedlar from Kansk, the other, T., the contractor at Krasnoiarsk, who was found dead in his tarantass two days ago,

near Touloung, his throat cut from ear to ear. I saw the body myself, and it was not a pleasant sight, I assure you. His yemstchik and the horses have since disappeared, which proves to me that the drivers have a good deal to do with it. No, well armed though you be, take my advice and travel only by day, till you have left the town of Nijni Udinsk far behind you." [1]

"Their mode of attack is simple," said V., in answer to my inquiry, and pouring himself out a huge tumbler of vodka (his fifth). "Travellers are never molested in the day-time. It is only at night that these blackguards (of whom there are sixty or seventy) attack wayfarers. The most dangerous hours are between 3 and 6 a.m., when travellers who have been on the *qui-vive* all night, somewhat relax their vigilance. A couple of the thieves are told off to cut the traces,

[1] Extract from the *Volga Messenger*, of October 16th, 1887 :—

"The entire tract of country between Tomsk and Irkoutsk is infested with runaway convicts, so that travelling in this region, especially on dark autumn nights, is extremely dangerous. Lately a whole family was murdered at the distance of a few versts from Irkoutsk, and we hear of such cases frequently enough. So bad is the state of the roads in this respect, that the Government is about to put a stop to it by abolishing exile to Siberia, and a proposal to this effect is now under the consideration of the Imperial Council."

two more to seize and bind the yemstchik (accomplice or not), and three or four others at the same moment to climb over the back of the tarantass, and falling suddenly in front of the hood, despatch the passengers with a blow from a heavy bludgeon. According to report, they have no firearms. Most of the victims are first stunned, and then their throats are cut. In no case of late has a traveller's life been spared." But, as V. remarked, it was a significant fact, that not a single yemstchik had lost his life, while no less than twelve travellers had been brutally murdered.

The sun was high in the heavens when we rose the next morning, V.'s entertaining conversation having kept us up till past five o'clock. Yet we woke to find them both gone, for they had left, the post-master informed us, a little after seven o'clock. For staying powers in the sitting-up line, commend me to a Russian Cossack. It is my firm belief that many never sleep at all. Perhaps vodka is the secret.

We were anxious, if possible, to reach Tiretskaya, fifty versts distant, before sundown, and make the latter our sleeping-place. It would not be difficult task, the post-master said. There was bu

one relay at Zalarinsk, twenty versts off, and unless we fell in with the mail from Petersburg, then about due, we were sure to be able to get horses without delay. The troika was therefore put in at once, and we were hastily swallowing a couple of glasses of tea, preparatory to a fast of twelve hours, when a shouting and cracking of whips was heard in the village street, and in another minute in galloped the mail, four mud-splashed carts, followed by a tarantass, in which, armed to the teeth and resplendent in green and gold, reclined the courier in charge.

"Lochade scorei" (horses quickly), shouted the latter, as he leapt from the tarantass, and brushed past us into the waiting-room, where a few moments after, we saw him pouring down tumbler after tumbler of scalding tea. To appeal to his finer feelings was, we knew, useless. Sadly we watched, as our troika was ruthlessly taken out and harnessed to a mail-cart, to the evident satisfaction and amusement of the courier, who, having finished his tea, was smoking a cigarette and watching our discomfiture with no little amusement. "Sibiri, gospodin!" he said, as he climbed into his tarantass, and the cortège dashed off again on its

way to China. It was indeed Siberia! and we realized to the full that patience is a virtue, when the post-master told us that under no circumstances could we hope to get horses till five o'clock that evening.

The long sunny day wore slowly away. There was absolutely nothing to do, or look at, and time hung fearfully heavy on our hands. Towards mid-day we strolled up to the prison, situate as usual about a hundred yards outside the village.

The village prisons, or temporary resting-places for prisoners on the road to the mines, are square or rather oblong wooden buildings, three sides of which form quarters for the convicts and their guards, while the remaining wing, a little detached from the main building, is used for washing and cooking purposes. The open courtyard in the centre of the building is used for exercise. It is rough and unpaved, and in wet weather often knee-deep in mud and slush. This yard is entered by a pair of high gates, the only entrance to the building, the whole being surrounded by a high palisade, at every corner of which is posted, night and day, a sentry with a loaded rifle. This vigilance, however, is only maintained during the summer months. From April

to October it is a very different matter; and as the sentries often sleep upon their posts, and the bars and gratings of the windows are so rickety and insecure that a child could dislodge them, escape becomes comparatively easy. An escape or attempted escape does not increase the length of a prisoner's sentence. There is a chance of a sound flogging with rods if the runaway is brought back, but that is all. Without the connivance of their guards, I doubt if prisoners would ever attempt to break out at all, and were the prison officials more careful, not to say conscientious, in the discharge of their duties, the Siberian roads would be comparatively safe, instead of being, as they now are, infested with thieves and desperadoes of the worst description. There is another and still more powerful reason, which was explained to us by our travelling acquaintance V., and one that clearly demonstrates that the highest as well as the lowest officials connected with Siberian prisons are very far from being *sans reproche*. The practice I am about to describe, however, takes place only in the remoter districts of Eastern Siberia, whence no whisper of the scandal is ever likely to reach the ears of the Petersburg authorities.

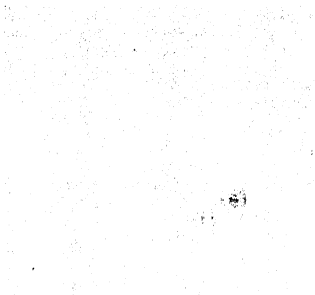
It is marvellously simple. Lieutenant A., of the Imperial Guard, having lived not wisely but too well in the Russian capital, is compelled to exchange, and finds himself transferred in five or six short months from the gaiety and gilded salons of Petersburg to some desolate convict settlement in the Trans-Baïkal, his only society the Cossacks under his command; his sole occupation, maintaining order among the two or three hundred convicts in his charge. The next station, thirty versts off, is under the command of his friend and brother officer in misfortune, Lieutenant B., who to lighten the long, wintry evenings, makes periodical visits to A. Heavy drinking, high play, and other little amusements, which I need not mention, but which will continue so long as female prisoners exist in Siberia, are the result of these meetings; very frequently, also, one of the guardsmen loses considerably more than he is able to pay. A Russian would sooner die than owe a debt of honour, but the pockets of both these dashing guardsmen are probably sadly deficient of that necessary commodity, "ready money." There is but one way out of the difficulty. Early in spring, a batch of fifty or sixty convicts are liberated (upon

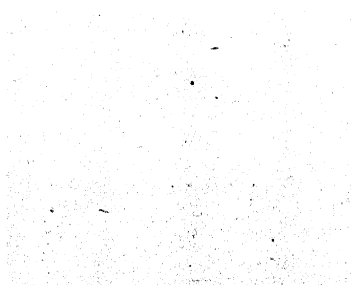
the understanding that they return before the end of September) to get their living as best they can upon the roads. Some have been known to reach Tomsk from Nertchinsk on these summer excursions. Nor do they ever fail to return, for none but a lunatic would ever think twice of escaping outright from Siberia. During the absence of the gang, M. le Lieutenant draws the money for their rations, &c. from Petersburg, and discharges his just debts. "Cela n'est pas plus difficile que cela!"

Though I visited three "ostrogs," it was only with considerable difficulty and a lavish expenditure of roubles that I succeeded in doing so. It seems strange that the Russian Government should show such a strong dislike to strangers visiting their convict establishments, for I must confess to being most agreeably disappointed by what I saw. Notwithstanding all the blood-curdling and revolting accounts so vividly set forth by the authors of "Called Back," "The Russians of To-day," and similar works, I found the prisons of Siberia clean and comfortable, though perhaps not so sweet-smelling as our convict establishments at Chatham or Dartmoor. It would be hard to keep them so, considering that every twenty-four hours brings in

a fresh batch of prisoners, each in wet weather, with a pound or so of black, stinking mud on his feet. At one village only (Rasgonnaia) along the whole post-road from Irkoutsk to Tomsk was the ostrog (a very old one) almost uninhabitable. It swarmed with rats, the post-master told us, and convicts, in winter, were sometimes severely bitten; while they were forced to sleep in the daytime, rest at night being rendered impossible by the swarms of vermin. Let me in justice add that this was the only really bad ostrog I heard of or saw during the whole journey, and the authorities were on the point of pulling it down and building a new one. We hear a deal in England of wretched hovels, where convicts are housed together like sheep in a pen, human pigstyes reeking with filth of every description, where not a day passes but a prisoner is carried off by typhus or some other malignant fever. As a matter of fact I have seldom seen neater buildings. But for the black and white sentry boxes, the barred windows, and imperial eagle over the gate, one would never take them for prisons at all, and they were often, with their bright yellow walls, red roof, and neatly kept gardens, the only cheerful-looking building in the squalid villages

THE POST-HOUSE AT RASGONNAIA.





ırough which we passed. The ostrog at Koutoulik as empty, but a gang was expected that afternoon, Cossack told us. Preparations for their arrival vere already being made in the shape of cakes, cream, eggs, apples, sweetmeats, and cigarettes spread out on snowy linen cloths for the delectation of lucky convicts who had made a few kopeks on the road.

We strolled back to the post-house after our inspection, and called in sheer desperation for the Samovar. There was literally nothing else to do. Seven long hours must be got through before we could hope to get horses and proceed on our journey. It is this eternal delay, this irksome waiting that makes Siberian travel so monotonous and dispiriting. The fatigue and privation were trifling compared to the long weary days of boredom and inaction. We got into a habit at last of calling mechanically for tea at every station. Fifteen or twenty glasses were, after the first week, our daily allowance, and I verily believe I drank tea enough during the two months I was in Siberia to keep a dozen old maids going for a year.

Koutoulik consists of some eighteen or twenty houses and presented a depressing appearance

enough even that bright sunny afternoon, for the village was deserted by all save women, children, dogs, and pigs, the men being busy in the fields getting in the harvest. Under the guidance of the post-master, a Pole who spoke a few words of French, I visited one of the cottages. Most of the women were dirty, bedraggled creatures, but some of the younger girls were good-looking, and the children many of them beautiful, with fair flaxen hair and light blue eyes that made one wonder how such thoroughly northern types of beauty could have been born and reared so far east. The mistress of the cottage we entered (a young and rather pretty woman) apologized for her costume, which consisted simply and solely of a thin and almost transparent muslin nightgown reaching a little below the knee; the only garment worn indoors by peasant women in the brief but tropical Siberian summer. We begged her not to apologize, assuring her that the costume, though scanty, suited her remarkably well.

The interior of the cottage was, though primitive, scrupulously clean. In one corner hung the sacred "Ikon," or image of the Holy Virgin, a huge brick stove immediately facing it. Half a dozen wooden

chairs and a rough pine table comprised the furniture, the flooring of the room was at an angle of about forty-five degrees, which made sitting down a somewhat dangerous experiment. From the centre of the roof hung a Siberian cradle, a kind of linen bag secured by a long rope to a hook in the ceiling, to which our hostess gave a swing every twenty minutes or so, the length of the cord keeping it (and her last born) in motion for quite that length of time.

While we were smoking a cigarette and regaling ourselves with a glass of iced "Quass,"[2] the pretty housewife, who soon lost her shyness, produced a Russian guitar, and sang to us (in a sweet, clear voice) two or three national airs. One, a Volga boat-song, seems an especial favourite, for we heard it continually the whole way from Kiakhta to Nijni Novgorod, sung by peasants, prisoners, and yemstchiks alike. The Siberian peasantry appear to have a good ear for music, but their airs are nearly all in minor, and intensely depressing, after a time, to a European ear.

The Siberian peasant cannot be called over-

[2] A kind of spruce beer.

taxed, all that the imperial Government exacts being a poll-tax of seventeen roubles. Those living on the Great Post-Road are exempt from this even, if they breed and provide horses for the postal service, of course receiving a remuneration for the same. The men are cheery, good-tempered fellows enough, with, as a rule, but one vice, drunkenness; when they do take too much, it is done in a good-tempered way, and they become more urbane and benevolent than when sober. I have never once seen a Siberian quarrelsome in his cups, though I met many the worse for vodka in every town we passed through. As regards the women, they are clean, thrifty, and very religious, but at the same time rather lax in their morals, a mixture of qualities not peculiar, I imagine, to Siberia.

It was nearly seven o'clock before we left Koutoulik, so we had to abandon all hopes of getting further than Zalarinsk (the next station, twenty-eight versts distant) that night. We looked to our pistols before starting, and took care to let the yemstchik see we were armed, for it was a desolate, cutthroat-looking road, and the forest so thick one could hardly see a foot either side of th tarantass, but we kept a bright look-out, wit

A SIBERIAN VILLAGE STREET.

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revolvers at half-cock, and had we been attacked, our assailants would have met with a warm reception. About ten o'clock some twinkling lights ahead heralded the approach of Zalarinsk, and by half-past ten we were safe for the night.

The succeeding two days were, as regards weather, perfect, a blue cloudless sky and bright sun, which at mid-day was sometimes too hot to be pleasant; on more than one occasion the thermometer rose to over 90° Fahr., although the instant the sun set it sometimes dropped to only a few degrees above Zero, so rapid are the changes of temperature. On the 26th of August the country became more cultivated, and the thick forest gave place to large clearings of corn, maize, and mustard. This was on the eastern side of Tiretskaya. The latter village passed, the landscape again changed, and we returned to dull, monotonous pine forests, varied by occasional silver-birch-trees or bushes with bright red and white berries. Siberia is noted for the latter. There are no less than twenty different kinds, and in parts of the country they form, with black bread, the staple food of the inhabitants in summer-time. We found most of them insipid, flavourless things, with the exception of the

"Brousniki," a kind of bilberry, which eaten with cream and sugar was delicious. The "Brousniki" is also very efficacious as a febrifuge.

Two large caravans were passed between Zalarinsk and Tiretskaya; one laden with calico, ironmongery, and Manchester goods—the other with tea—the former eastward, the latter westward bound. Each consisted of over two hundred carts, in charge of about eight or ten men, who, till our driver had roused the foremost with a cut of his whip, were fast asleep when we came up to them, the horses rolling about the road from side to side, and threatening every moment to dash the clumsy heavy carts into our tarantass. The tea-caravans travel day and night, only halting five hours out of the twenty-four, from 1 p.m. till 3 p.m., and midnight till three o'clock in the morning. Yet the horses looked sleek and fat, and not in the least out of condition, the reason, perhaps, being that they never exceed a speed of three miles an hour.

We rarely passed more than two or three conveyances in a day, and this is what makes posting in Siberia so irksome and monotonous. Between the villages there is absolutely nothing to look at but the dreary sand-coloured road—the end

vista of dark green forest. A cottage is never found alone in Siberia or outside a village *enceinte*. Except in the villages, usually twenty to thirty versts apart, one sees no dwelling of any sort or kind. The monotony, after a week or so, becomes absolutely maddening. What must it be to the wretched exiles who sometimes take two years to reach their destination!

We reached Tiretskaya at sunset. A large river just beyond this station was swollen by the rains to a considerable, not to say dangerous, extent. Only that evening the ferry had been carried away and washed down-stream, the Petersburg mail having to wait out in the open, on the river-bank, till it was repaired. This was not pleasant news, but we derived some consolation from the fact that the weather was fine and the glass rising. We had the waiting-room to ourselves till midnight, when a téléga clattered into the yard, and out clambered an enormously fat man and a small, wizened woman, who informed us, before they had been in the room five minutes, that they were newly married, and had come straight through from Irkoutsk. Divested of their furs, I discovered that the man was clad in a bran-new

suit of shining broadcloth, the woman in what had evidently been her bridal array, a white muslin dress, covered with sprays of orange blossom, but terribly soiled and creased by travel and the amorous advances of her bridegroom, to say nothing of the mud and dirty straw of the téléga. When the partner of his joys and sorrows had retired to rest (on two chairs), the unhappy bridegroom became confidential, and confided to me, in a low tone, that he would much rather have remained quietly in Irkoutsk, that he did not like this sort of thing at all, and was only doing it to amuse his bride! I could not help, like Mr. Pickwick, envying the facility with which the lady was amused. "I shall take her as far as Nijni Udinsk, if her strength holds out," he said resignedly, "if not, we shall return to Irkoutsk." What a honeymoon! Next morning, when I woke, they were gone.

I shall never forget my first night in a Siberian post-house. Unless the traveller falls asleep at once, it is long odds against his getting any rest at all, for tarantasses and télégas are arriving and leaving at all hours of the night. There is (by order) a lamp kept burning till morning, and the jingle of bells, shouting of yemstchiks and

stamping of heavy feet on the carpetless floor, that goes on at intervals through the night, would waken the dead. There is another powerful antidote to sleep in every Siberian post, be it ever so clean—vermin—to say nothing of cockroaches and rats, who subsist on the scraps of food dropped on the floor by travellers, and who run about the floor and over one's face and body with supreme indifference during the quieter moments of the night. Till I went to Siberia, I had the most unutterable loathing for rats; but now, like the Yankee and the snake, I almost feel lonely without them.

About 2 a.m. the cocks commenced crowing, and were promptly answered by the dogs of the village. Long before daylight the inhabitants of the post-house were astir and bustling about, cleaning up, lighting fires, chopping wood, &c. I usually rose about 4 a.m., and, lighting a cigarette, amused myself by studying the strange types of humanity around me till the samovar made its appearance. They were a strange, motley crew, as a rule. Men and women lying about pell-mell, and looking, in the weird half-light between night and day, like a lot of corpses in a *fosse commune*. One

could always tell at a glance, the new hands at the game; the Russian official's wife travelling the post-road for the first time in smart, tailor-made gown, beaver toque, and costly furs, or the Siberian with her awkward, ill-cut dress in the fashion of thirty years ago. It was second nature to the latter to remain unwashed for a couple of weeks, and sleep on the filthy floor, with, perhaps, a greasy, ragged Jew pedler for a neighbour, but one could not help pitying the better class,[3] travelling from St. Petersburg or Moscow to rejoin their husbands in Eastern Siberia or the Amour district, sitting, if they could get them, on the hard, stiff-backed, wooden chairs all through the night, and almost falling off them at times from sheer weariness. The prettiest looked hideous in the early morning hours, with tangled hair, disordered dress, and pale, pasty faces, while their diamond rings only served to show off the blackness of their

[3] Such a one is the young and beautiful Countess Ignatieff, wife of the Governor of Irkoutsk, who, it would seem, is as much at home in the frozen forests of Eastern Siberia as in the salons of Paris or Petersburg. One of her latest exploits was to accompany the general to Yakoutsk—a voyage of three months from Irkoutsk—the greater part of which had to be accomplished in small birch-bark canoes.

hands and nails, which they had probably been unable to wash for days. Few women look well, even in England, at six in the morning after a ball. Imagine their appearance after a dozen nights and days of Siberian travel. Many of the post-houses are worse than that I have described, but few are better. I have seen sights in these waiting-rooms that will not bear description. They are better left to the reader's imagination; for in matters of decency the Siberian, *pur et simple*, is inferior to the Chinese.

I date the commencement of our mishaps and difficulties from the morning of the 27th of August, when I awoke in the dirty, little waiting-room of Tiretskaya post-house to find the rain pouring down in torrents, the sky one mass of grey, woolly clouds. It had evidently been raining some hours, for the road in front of the post-house was one pool of water, almost half-way up to the axle of our tarantass, on the roof of which the rain was pelting down unmercifully. Instinct told me that the water inside was quite an inch deep by this time. Mentally thanking Providence that we had taken out the mattress, I rolled myself in my furs and went to sleep again. It was hopeless to think

of starting with a dangerous river to cross and the next post twenty-five versts distant.

The weather cleared a little towards mid-day, and we resolved, though it was still raining hard, to make a start, and, if possible, reach Listvinskaya, seventy odd versts distant, that evening. The tarantass had to be baled out before we got in. A tarantass for Irkoutsk arrived as we were putting to, and reported the ferry in working order, though the river was rapid and swollen to a dangerous extent. We thanked our informants and set off. The latter were travelling *en famille*, Monsieur and madame, four children and a nurse, all packed into the same tarantass. I envied them, for they had, at any rate, the advantage of warmth, the weather having suddenly become raw and cold, with, every now and then, blinding showers of sleet.

Although the river Oka is situated only a mile or so from the village of Tiretskaya, it took us nearly an hour to reach the ferry. Parts of the road were entirely submerged, and our yemstchik had to find his way by guesswork. As we knew there was a broad, deep ditch on either side of the road, the work was, to say the least of it, exciting. It was im-

possible to go out of a walk, and even then it was as much as our five game little horses could do to drag the heavy, clumsy carriage along. We stuck fast twice, and all hands had to get out "to shove her off," knee-deep in icy cold water. We were wet through by the time the ferry was reached, and shivering with cold, a somewhat unpleasant condition in which to embark on a stage of twenty-five versts, which it would in all probability take us several hours to accomplish, supposing we ever succeeded in reaching Ziminskaia at all. There were, the ferryman said, four bridges to cross before we reached it, and one or two, at least, would probably have been washed away by now, for the floods were worse there.

The appearance of the river Oka was highly picturesque, but not reassuring. A broad, swiftly flowing stream at any time, continuous rains had widened its waters to double the ordinary width, the torrent now being quite a mile across. The rotten and insecure ferry looked as if a touch from one of the snags or tree-trunks which were whirling madly along the surface of the stream would send it to the bottom in a second, and the ferryman was for some time inexorable, but

the temptation of a 10r. note was too much for him, and with much muttering about "it would be our own fault if we were drowned," we got the tarantass and horses aboard, and shoved off for the opposite shore. Scarcely were the chains let go when a loud shout from the bank attracted my attention. The crowd were shouting and gesticulating, running backwards and forwards on the bank like madmen, and pointing to a splashing, indistinct mass in the water which I presently made out to be a man and a horse. The latter had been brought down to water, but the bank, rotten with perpetual rain, gave way, precipitating the animal and its rider into deep water. I have seldom experienced a moment of more intense excitement. It quite took our thoughts away from our own danger—for all this time we were forging slowly ahead. The ferryman dare not stop, nor could we have rendered the poor fellow any help, for the current was rapidly carrying him further and further into the centre of the river. He was evidently a good swimmer, but could, we saw, do nothing against the terrific force of the current. Three times we saw him rise to the surface, when his screams were pitiful to hear, but the third time he was silent, and throw-

ing up both arms, sank for the last time, in full view of us all. He was only twenty—the ferryman told us—a tall, good-looking fellow, who had stood by and given a hand to get our tarantass on board but three or four minutes before he met with his sad fate.

Crossing the river without mishap, we found the road on the other side in better order than the one we had left. At any rate it was not flooded, the yemstchiks could see where they were going, and there was not so much danger of being stranded ten miles from anywhere with a broken wheel or axle. Ziminskaia was reached at 3 p.m., and with a fresh relay of seven horses in (for which we had not to wait more than ten minutes), we continued our journey, hoping to reach Listvinskaya, fifty versts further on, some time that night, or the next morning.

Listvinskaya was reached at 11 p.m. The post-house was full of soldiers, who had been out all day in the rain, searching for prisoners, with no result, and no wonder. It was, indeed, a case of looking for a needle in a bundle of hay, to expect to find fugitives in these thick, impenetrable forests. We were not sorry when they had finished their

vodka and departed, leaving us at 2 a.m. to snatch a few hours' sleep, before again taking the road. The rain had now ceased, and the night was bright and starlit.

Our anticipations of a fine day were not disappointed, for we were awoke by the bright sun streaming into our faces, and the voice of our host inquiring how much longer we were going to sleep. And sure enough, worn out with fatigue and the anxieties of the previous day, we had slumbered on undisturbed by the noise of arrivals and departures, till past mid-day, or at least so the station clock said. But one was never quite sure about the time in Siberia. Every post-master has a time of his own. It seemed strange at first to leave, say, Tirestskaya station at nine in the morning, and arrive at Ziminskaia, twenty versts off, at half-past eight! But we soon got used to it, and after the first week never troubled our heads about the hour. It was but a minor detail.

We made good way that and the following day, and on the evening of the 29th of August reached the village of Touloung. But alas! good luck as regards weather was not destined to last. Just before sunset, the sky became overcast, and two hours before

reaching our destination for the night the rain was falling in torrents. The hood was, as usual, worse than useless, and in a few minutes we were wet through to the skin. There were fortunately no more rivers between us and Nijni Udinsk, which town, all being well, we hoped to reach on the morrow.

Had we known that night that we were destined to be imprisoned in the filthy room in which we slept for two days, I doubt if we should have retired to rest in such good spirits. We had come to the end of our provisions, and should now have to subsist entirely on the meagre fare provided by the post-houses. I could stand everything well enough but the bread. Oh! that Siberian bread. My stomach recoils at the mere recollection of the sour, greasy substance, as black as ink, as heavy as lead, and in consistency so soft and damp, that one could pull it out like a piece of unbaked dough.

Swallowing a glass of tea, we rolled up in our furs, wet through as we were. Such a proceeding in England would probably have resulted in an attack of rheumatic fever, but a special providence seems to watch over one's health in

Siberia, and we never had a day's sickness, hard though the work, and short the supply of food and (with the exception of tea) drink. We did not get much sleep that night, but lay awake, listening to the howling of the wind and pattering of the rain on the window-panes. About two in the morning I dropped into an uneasy dose, from which I awoke about an hour after, to find the old post-master replenishing the stove. "A terrible night, gospodin," he muttered, tossing a huge pine log into the flame. "One almost pities the Katorgi, with no roof over their heads. Poor devils, they must be like drowned rats!" Too tired to answer, I was about to turn on my side, when a loud knock startled me into a sitting position, and brought the old man shuffling back from the kitchen in double quick time. It was no tarantass or téléga. There had been no bells or sound of wheels. Whoever the nightly visitor was, he had come on foot. The old man displayed no desire to open the door, and showed signs of such uneasiness, that then, for the first time, flashed across me the words of our Cossack friend at Koutoulik, "Keep a good look-out about Touloung. They are worse there than anywhere."

A second knock, louder than the first, cut short my reflections, and induced me to make signs to the Pole that my revolver was loaded, and that Lancaster (who was still slumbering peacefully) had a similar weapon. Apparently reassured, he then went to the door, unbolted it, and let in the mysterious visitor.

A tall, spare man with reddish grey beard and moustache, apparently about sixty years of age, pushed rudely past the Pole and entered the room; and divesting himself of a huge bearskin pelisse, sank into a chair with a sigh of satisfaction. "Enfin!" he muttered in French, adding in Russian sharply, "I thought you were going to keep me out there all night. Why did you not open sooner? Come! quick, the samovar, and some eggs and bread. Don't stand staring there like a fool."

That the stranger had no earthly right to order provisions in a Government post-house, without a podarojna, I was well aware. This fact, however, did not seem to occur to the post-master, who slunk away without a word of remonstrance to get the refreshments. In the meantime, being unobserved, I had a good opportunity of taking stock of the new arrival from behind my dacha.

It was not a pleasing or reassuring countenance. One thing especially struck me as curious; he had not removed his cap on entering the room, and had, apparently, no intention of doing so. It is, as I have said, an unwritten law, that on entering an apartment in Russia the head shall be uncovered, more out of respect to the sacred Ikon, which always stands in one corner, than out of politeness to the occupants of the compartment. I had never yet seen the rule departed from, and felt sure that the man had some hidden motive in remaining covered. His dress was unique if not becoming: a pair of grey tweed trousers, surmounted by a Siberian peasant's caftan, secured by a broad red sash round the waist, and a pair of high-heeled, buttoned boots. Save for a thick wooden cudgel, which lay on the table beside him, the stranger was apparently unarmed. Who could the man be? and where in Heaven's name had he dropped from this wild stormy night, or rather morning? for I noticed with satisfaction that day was beginning to dawn.

Who he was, must remain a mystery. He left about 5 a.m., as suddenly as he had come, and the old post-master was either too frightened or

too lazy to send up to the prison for a couple of Cossacks. One circumstance convinced me that my suspicions were well founded. Having made a hearty meal of tea, black bread, and sardines, he pushed his chair back, and resting both feet on the stove, lit a cigarette. While so doing his cap slipped off, and I distinctly saw that *one half of his head was partly shaved*, the distinguishing mark of the Siberian convict. That he was a "Katorgi" I do not for a moment doubt. He never once caught sight of me, lying as I was in the shadow of the table; but Lancaster, who slept calmly through the whole business, lay close to him, and my only wonder is that he did not take a fancy to the gold watch-chain lying so temptingly across my friend's chest. He left the post-house very quietly without paying for his food, nor did the old postmaster make any further remarks anent his strange visitor. It might have got him into trouble with the authorities.

The poor wretch had probably been starving for the past two or three days, afraid to show his face in the village near which so many brutal murders had been committed. Judging there would be few travellers abroad a night like this, he had made

for the post-house, and seeing, as he thought, its only inmate the old Pole, had summoned up courage to enter. It seemed odd that with the dirty and ragged dress he wore, a large diamond ring, sparkled on the first finger of his left hand. We afterwards heard that the contractor had been robbed of one of unusual size and brilliancy.

Any hopes we had of pushing on to Nijni Udinsk the next day were soon dispelled, for at about ten o'clock the Imperial post clattered in, and every available horse was harnessed to the mail-carts. We were not altogether sorry, for the rain was coming down as hard as ever. Even the dirty, dreary post-house was preferable to a long drive of eighty odd versts, wet to the skin and chilled to the bone, with a filthy post-house and no food at the end of the journey.

What a day that was! I have experienced many miserable hours in the course of my travels but never a day so wretched, and unspeakably depressing as that 30th of August in Touloung post-house. Save the mail, nothing passed the whole livelong day, not even a téléga. Having read all that the rain had left us of our books, we simply sat down and looked at each other in sheer despair. The

situation would have been laughable had it not seemed, at the time, so serious.

The main street of an Eastern Siberian village is not an inspiriting sight, even on a fine and sunny day. I have never looked upon a more dismal spectacle than met the eye from the post-house windows at Touloung. There were four, two looking on to the village street, the others on to a lonely barren stretch of common, at the end of which, through the grey mist, loomed the red roof of the ostrog. It was hard to say which depressed one most, the dirty village street, knee-deep in mud and filth, the dirty dilapidated houses; the only signs of life half a dozen mangy-looking ducks splashing and wallowing in the rain, and a couple of shivering post-horses crouching under shelter of our tarantass;—or the lonely, drab-coloured road, winding away like a great snake over the common, past the prison, and into a green mass of forest just beyond; the tall gaunt telegraph poles and black and white verst posts almost undistinguishable in the dense grey mist, dispelled, ever and anon, by driving showers of rain and sleet. The interior was no better than the look-out. Our amusement became at length

reduced to killing the flies, which swarmed in thousands on the dirty walls, and drinking tea, that never-failing solace of the Siberian traveller. There was no food in the house to speak of. The unwelcome visitor of last night had exhausted our old friend's stock, and reduced the contents of his larder to some salted "omuli" and a couple of loaves (or rather "lumps") of black bread. This constituted our evening meal. A buxom female, who appeared as if by magic from the innermost recesses of the kitchen, waited on us. We would willingly have dispensed with her services, for she was not only disgustingly dirty, but was afflicted, in addition, with a loathsome skin disease. Nor was it reassuring when our host explained the cause. "Poor girl," he said pensively, "she has suffered much the last three weeks. You would hardly think, to see her bustling about so cheerfully, that she only rose for the first time to-day from a bad attack of small-pox, caught from one of those beastly tea-caravans from China. Curse them! they spread it all over the country." Under any other circumstances I should have felt uneasy, but we were becoming so desperate that had violent symptoms developed themselves, I

believe we should have taken it quite as a matter of course. For this very reason, perhaps, neither of us caught it, for the fair "Liouba" had undoubtedly arrived at the most infectious stage of the disease.

Towards sunset the rain abated a little. About seven o'clock, some women emerged from the houses opposite, each carrying a basin and slice of black bread, which, having placed under shelter of the eaves, they left and returned within doors. A Siberian woman's out-door costume on a rainy day is even more peculiar than that in which she receives her guests in summer, for, from the waist downwards, with the exception of a pair of high boots reaching to the knee, there is no attempt at clothing of any description, the linen skirt being fastened apparently round the neck. The appearance of these worthy dames all at once at the gates of their courtyards was curious in the extreme, nor did they appear the least disconcerted when they caught sight of our faces at the window. On inquiry, It is the custom, throughout Siberia, for the peasants of every village and town to place outside each house refreshment of some sort (which usually takes the shape of bread and milk) for the

use of any convict that may make his escape. The rule is an old one, nor has it ever been interfered with by the Imperial Government. It is also understood that the bowl and plate holding the provisions shall not be tampered with or taken away, china utensils being rather valuable in Eastern Siberia. Whenever this code of honour has been infringed the next convict who escapes is bound, should he come across him, to kill the thief. A sentence of this kind was carried out near Tomsk while we were staying there. Both convicts had made their escape from the ostrog at Kolinskaya, about ninety versts from Tomsk, the first escaping about three weeks before the second. As usual, both made what they could upon the road, till the latter accidentally heard of the theft committed by the former, and never rested till he had hunted him down, and after a severe struggle beaten him to death with a bludgeon. His body was found in the forest some days later.

But if the day at Touloung had been depressing, the night was infinitely more so. The remains of our scanty meal having been carried away by the small-pox patient, the post-master appeared with two guttering tallow dips, which just sufficed to

make darkness visible, and, bidding us good night, retired to the depths of his ill-smelling den, whence, a few moments after, there issued sounds of music in the shape of a groaning, wheezing concertina. We were given the benefit of this inspiriting music from a little past eight o'clock till far into the night. I used to think the Russian National Anthem a fine and stirring composition, but can, even now, scarcely hear it without a shudder. It was the only tune he knew. It was past 1 a.m. when I got to sleep. The howling of the wind, and rattling of the rain and sleet against the window-panes, made one feel thankful one was under shelter, even in such a den as this. A huge grey rat, sitting near on the floor, his eyes gleaming in the semi-darkness, appeared to share my opinion. Two months before, I could not have slept a wink with the knowledge that such an animal was in the room, but I now composed myself to slumber quite unconcernedly, although with the firm conviction that when asleep, he, and probably many others, would be scrambling over my body and face. An excellent school is Siberia for the fastidious, and I know many a youthful London "masher" who would derive incalculable benefit (both physical and

and mental) from a short residence at Touloung.

Awakening at five o'clock, I sprang eagerly to the window, to see how the weather was. Alas! it was pouring harder than ever. Still the same sodden grey sky of yesterday, with sooty-coloured clouds driving over it, still the same desolate landscape, dripping houses, and distant forest shrouded in white mist. Another day at Touloung! Cursing Siberia and everything connected with it, I wrapped myself in my pelisse, and lay down again on the filthy worm-eaten floor, nor did I wake again till past ten o'clock, to find a new arrival seated, in front of the hissing samovar, and the rain coming down harder than ever.

The new comer was a Jew, and a very dirty one into the bargain, though evidently a man of means, as his private tarantass and fat podgy hands, covered with enormous diamond rings, testified. Like most of his race, he was as curious as a monkey, and no sooner had I opened my eyes than I was assailed with the usual bevy of questions. "What was my nationality?" "Where had I come from?" "Where was I going?" "What was my income?" and finally, "What had brought me to Siberia?" My answer, "Pleasure,"

was invariably met with shouts of laughter on these occasions. Nor, now that I have crossed that dreary country, can I blame my fellow-travellers for what at the time I looked upon as a somewhat rude and unnecessary display of mirth. The Jew spoke a little French, and was a welcome addition to our melancholy party, for besides being a cheery, talkative fellow, full of fun and anecdote, he had a large stock of provisions. We were, almost starving, and accepted with alacrity his invitation to join him in a tin of preserved mutton, washed down by a couple of glasses of vodka. I do not know when I ever enjoyed a meal more. We had not tasted solid food for nearly three days, and the pangs of hunger were beginning to make themselves felt in a most painful and unmistakable manner. We more than once experienced, seriously speaking, the pains of starvation in Siberia: that terrible gnawing sensation at the pit of the stomach which is so hard to describe, but which for sheer mental and physical suffering is unequalled.

Our Hebrew friend was, it transpired, a bagman "travelling" in gunpowder, and a native of Irkoutsk. He was now on his way to Tashkent, in Central Asia, having come the whole distance from Nicolaievsk, on the Sea of Okhotsk, without a break,

save a rest of a couple of days in his native city. Such a voyage as ours paled before the prodigious length of this journey, which must be at least four thousand miles from end to end. The Jew had already done it four times, once in winter, an experiment, he added, he would not care to repeat. "In summer," said our talkative friend, "it is charming. Like what you English would call one great *Picque-Nicque*." How I envied the little man his cheerful disposition!

He made a start by five o'clock, when the weather cleared a little, and by nine o'clock the sky was cloudless and covered with bright stars. Dreading a rainy morrow, we almost decided to have the horses put in and push on at once. The next station could not, at any rate, be worse than Touloung, and might be better; but the post-master begged us not to attempt it. The floods were out in places, and he had but a young and inexperienced yemstchik to give us, who would probably lose his head, should anything go wrong. We were not sorry next day that we had taken the old man's advice. Morning broke bright and clear, though the roofs of the houses were still wet and gleaming in the sunshine, as with six horses in, we

slowly made our way up the miry street, and said good-bye, with a sigh of relief, to the grimy post-house in which we had passed so many dreary, comfortless hours.

A newly steam-ploughed field in the boggiest parts of Cambridgeshire after a week's steady and incessant rain, but faintly describes the condition in which we found the road. In many places it was entirely submerged, and we had to trust to Providence and the yemstchik's knowledge of the road for safety. At one place the water was well over the hind wheels. We were not sorry to emerge on dry land again, for we had to cross a broken-down bridge during this aquatic interlude, when a false move to the right or left would have precipitated us into a ditch about ten feet deep and broad in proportion. For the first eighteen versts it was quite impossible to attempt a faster pace than a walk, and several times we stuck altogether. It was anxious work, for a loosened bolt or screw, a broken axle, may, in Siberia, detain one for a week or more. We had not much confidence in our yemstchik, who could not at the most have been more than twelve or thirteen years old, and should have fared badly had we adhered to our original intention and

started over-night, for the horses did exactly as they liked. What the little imp lacked in strength, however, he made up in assurance, and waved his whip about, alternately cursing and praising his team after the most approved style. We had a narrow escape of an upset once when the horses, taking fright at a dead horse on the side of the road, made a bolt for it into the forest. Luckily a large hole into which the tarantass dived, brought us up all standing, and saved us from further mishap. During this performance two of the traces broke, and we were detained over an hour repairing them. Three télégas and a tarantass having passed us meanwhile, we were detained at the next station (Kourjinskaya) for twenty-four hours.

The utterly inadequate number of horses kept at each station may be said to have been one of our chief drawbacks. Whenever, on the road, one has the misfortune to meet the post, it is impossible, although the mail consists, as a rule, of four or six tarantasses, at the most, to procure horses, and a long weary wait is the result. Sometimes, when we had the post-house to ourselves, it was bearable enough, but on most

occasions our sufferings were shared by a number of other travellers. Sitting or standing in a bare, whitewashed room for half a dozen hours together, is not conducive to good temper or conversation, and on these occasions the waiting-room reminded me of nothing so much as a cage of wild beasts, each eyeing the other with envy, hatred, and malice, the women especially looking as if they would like to tear each other's eyes out. The peculiarities of men too came out at such times, some taking the matter coolly and philosophically, alternately drinking tea and smoking cigarettes, till their horses were ready; others pacing restlessly up and down the room, cursing the post-master, yemstchiks, and everybody connected with the establishment; others, again, subsiding into a state of dull apathy, and staring straight before them for hours together. I often thought at such times of men I know in England, to whom a wait of a couple of hours in a snug waiting-room, surrounded by papers and books, food and drink, is an excuse for a good British grumble. I thought of what they would say to a detention of three days, or so, in one of these post-houses, with nothing but tea for nourish-

ment, nothing to look at but four dirty whitewashed walls, nothing to do but to pace up and down for hours together, to try and keep the circulation going in one's tired, hungry frame, a thousand-mile journey before them, and probably a dozen such delays ere they reached their final destination!

I will not weary the reader with an account of every stage. Suffice it to say that we reached Nijni Udinsk, after some delay and trouble, on the 31st of August; and with the exception of the desert, I do not think I have ever made a rougher or more uncomfortable journey than that from Touloung to this town. The last stage was a terrible one, and I thought more than once we should have to abandon all hope of reaching Nijni Udinsk that night at any rate. About half-way the horses, of which we had seven in, shied while crossing a rickety wooden bridge, both near wheels went over the edge, and for a few moments things looked ugly. Though the team plunged a good deal, however, no harm was done, and by the aid of two young fir-trees that our yemstchiks cut down, we got the clumsy vehicle hoisted on to *terra firma* again. Although well broken into jolting and shaking by camel-cart experiences, I do not think I

ever made a more fatiguing journey. Our bodies and bones ached for days after.

We were detained some time at the ferry over the River Uda, on which river the town of Nijni Udinsk is situated, for a caravan of over 200 carts was being taken across, and it was quite an hour before we managed to persuade the ferry-man to take us on board. In the meantime we amused ourselves watching the busy scene and the frantic efforts made by men and horses to drag the heavy tea-carts up the steep river-bank. Not a hundred yards off, a young and pretty woman was bathing in the stream, stark naked, a proceeding which seemed to amuse not a little the ragged, wild-looking fellows in charge of the caravan. Some, bolder than the rest, ventured to embark in an interchange of chaff with the fair bather, who, far from being dismayed, only laughed and showed her white teeth derisively, giving her assailants back as good as they gave. Siberian women are certainly not troubled with shyness.

It was dusk when we reached the post-house, a large brick building, with a good garden and shady courtyard. The waiting-room was taken possession of by five Japanese youths, who, after a course

of study at St. Petersburg, were returning to Japan *viâ* Wladivostok and the Amour. But the innkeeper's wife (a pretty flaxen-haired Swede), would not hear of our sharing the big room with the Japs, but laid us a table in her own private sitting-room, where, at the open window, looking on to the garden, redolent of sweetbriar and honeysuckle, we enjoyed the first comfortable meal we had made for nearly a fortnight. Our little hostess prepared it with her own hands, and took quite a motherly interest in us, a kindness we could not but repay by visiting and admiring her firstborn (a little chubby-cheeked girl of a few weeks old), the miniature of her mother, that lay asleep in a swinging cradle suspended from the ceiling of her neat, chintz-curtained bedroom. That all post-houses were like this, I thought, as I turned in on a comfortable (and stuffed) sofa. A slight touch of frost in the air made a couple of blankets, that our little friend insisted on giving us, very acceptable, and a last look at the night having shown us a bright moon and cloudless sky, we slept soundly without any fear of rain on the morrow.

Had we consulted our own wishes, we should

have stayed at least a couple of days at this friendly oasis, but time would not allow us more than a few hours' rest, and bidding farewell to our kind little hostess, we had left Nijni Udinsk far behind us ere the sun had fairly risen. The town, is neatly and regularly built, and contains about four thousand inhabitants. Though the pavements are of wood, many of the houses are of whitewashed brick, which, with their bright green roofs and shutters, somewhat relieve the melancholy effect which in every Siberian town is produced by the sombre colour of the roads, and unpainted wooden houses. There were but one or two shops, however, for the sale of stores of all kinds; and the streets, though broad and regular, were unlighted.

All went "merry as a marriage bell" for two days after leaving Nijni Udinsk, the weather, though cold and frosty at nights, remaining bright and fine. The aspect of the country, too, was more picturesque and cheerful than any we had passed through since leaving the Trans-Baikal. The roads were smoother and wider. By the side, wild roses, convolvuli, bluebells, and wild hyacinth grew luxuriantly—while a kind of high, red-leafed fern, common in this district, gave a pleasant and bright

relieving spot of colour to the dull, monotonous pine and larch.

As a set-off to these advantages, however, we suffered terribly from mosquitoes, which swarmed by day, but which, as soon as the sun had set, were driven in by the cold. So bad were they, that the peasants we passed on the road or in the corn-fields wore black gauze veils, fastened like a mask over their faces, and we had cause to regret not having provided ourselves with these safeguards, for, for the few days they lasted, these plagues gave one no rest for an instant, and one's blood was in a constant state of fever, from the irritation set up by the poisonous bites. Fortunately they did not trouble us long, and once past Atchinsk disappeared altogether.

Scarcely a day now passed that we did not meet prisoners, in gangs of two to three hundred each, on their way to Irkoutsk, Chita, and other parts of Eastern Siberia. The appearance of our tarantass was invariably the signal for stragglers to fall in, and as we passed through the crowd, the poor wretches pressed in eagerly on either side and begged for kopeks, cigarettes, and food, though, as regarded the latter necessary, we were usually as

badly off as they themselves. We noticed that the further west we got, many more of the men wore chains, probably on account of the facilities for escape being easier. Also that, while the ostrogs east of Tomsk are insecure, dilapidated buildings, those to the west are nearly all new and substantial-looking, surrounded by a double guard of Cossacks, and protected in many cases by a brick wall surmounted with high chevaux de frise.

I remember meeting a gang, two days after leaving Nijni Udinsk. It was a wild, desolate bit of road, and though a bright, sunny day, in semi-darkness, for the forest trees, through which we were passing, almost met over our heads. Suddenly, a turn of the road brought us full in view of one of the dismal grey processions with which we had now grown familiar, and as it was a large gang, we ordered the yemstchik to draw up for a few moments while they filed by. Poor wretches! There was but little talking or laughing that day. The heat and thirst had taken all desire for conversation out of them, for it had been a long stage, of nearly thirty versts, from the last ostrog, and they had still seven more to do before resting for the night. Mosquitoes fairly swarmed in

this defile, and the Cossacks on guard wore black gauze masks. I noticed, with satisfaction, that one of the brave fellows had taken off his to give to one of the women, who was struggling along with difficulty, two children clinging to her skirts. Seeing we had pulled up, they halted, as if by common consent, as they passed us, and led by one of the men, with a sweet tenor voice, struck up the sad, pathetic air, "Kouda Doroga Sibiri," we had heard on Lake Baikal. It was an impressive scene, the guard carelessly resting on their rifles, the men with their sunburnt, weary faces, the women in long robes of white, their children clinging to them, and joining with their tiny treble in the tune they knew so well. All sang in parts, and correctly, and with over two hundred voices, joining in the sweet melancholy air, the effect may be imagined.

About a mile further on we passed four télégas, containing political prisoners. On either side of each cart marched a Cossack with fixed bayonet and loaded rifle. The men, three in number, were in ordinary walking dress, which showed plainly the order to which they had belonged in happier days. It was easy to dis-

tinguish the *homme du peuple* in shabby, greasy garments taken from the scum of Petersburg or Odessa, from the slight, well-built man in the next téléga, in neat tweed suit, holding a cigarette in his small white hand, evidently a gentleman, who perhaps, but a few short months before had been surrounded with every comfort and luxury. The woman in the last téléga was neatly clad in a black silk gown, beginning to show slight symptoms of wear, and a red worsted "Tam O'Shanter" hat, a head-dress very popular among lady political exiles in Siberia. Though not pretty, she had a bright, clever face, and returned our bow with a pleasant smile and nod. We afterwards heard that this was Madame B——, who, for an alleged conspiracy against the Government at Odessa, was on her way to the mines of Kara, in the Trans-Baikal provinces, for life.

A large and luxurious tarantass brought up the rear of this weird procession. In the vehicle were a Cossack officer, and, seated by his side, a remarkably pretty and well-dressed woman. We had a good look at her, our yemstchiks stopping by mutual consent to have a chat and give the horses breathing-time. She did not look particularly

enamoured of her companion, a coarse, red-faced man with bristly grey moustache, bloodshot eyes, and spectacles. Hers was a true Russian face—small regular features, deep blue (almost violet) eyes, and that sweet sad expression rarely seen out of the Czar's dominions. In reply to my question, as soon as we had resumed our journey, if he knew who the lovely vision was, our yemstchik replied with a wink: "A prisoner's wife." The wink spoke volumes, and fully explained the poor woman's aversion to her travelling companion.

She was, we afterwards heard, the wife of Count L., the young and good-looking prisoner we had met in the téléga. It must have been somewhat tantalizing to travel on day after day, week after week, within sight of his wife, and yet not be allowed to open his lips; more maddening still to see the advances made by the untutored boor who a very short time before would have deemed it an honour to be allowed even to address her. This is perhaps one of the hardest evils that political exiles have to endure. The wife of a prisoner may by Russian law accompany her husband to his destination at the expense of the Government, on condition that she travels with the prisoners, lives on prison

food, sleeps in the ostrogs, and submits to prison discipline. There is but one distinction made between the wife of the political prisoner and the criminal convict, this being that the former is not compelled to walk, but may, if she prefers, travel in a "téléga," a vehicle so rough and uncomfortable that walking is infinitely preferable. But should a married woman be young and pretty, heaven help her, especially if, as is frequently the case, the Cossack lieutenant in charge of the party is susceptible to the charms of female beauty. No sooner has the barge arrived at Tomsk than her persecutions commence, nor do they end, as a rule, until the unhappy woman has ceased to resist the advances of her brutal admirer. The commander of a prison-gang is as great a despot in his way as the Czar of all the Russias, for there is no one to check or gainsay him, the whole way from Tomsk to the shores of Okhotsk, and who would take the word of a convict (and especially a political one) against that of an officer of the Czar? In most cases the unfortunate husband is the unconscious means by which the wife is brought to her ruin. Threats of punishment, deprivation of food, and even flogging are made by the human

devil in charge, till at length, worn out with repeated insults and ill-treatment, the poor wife too often yields, and is promoted to a place in his tarantass, whence she is forced to submit daily to the silent reproaches of the husband for whose good, in nine cases out of ten, she has fallen.

I heard in Tomsk many sad and heart-breaking narratives, but none perhaps so touching as the case of a young Scotchwoman, Mrs. B., whose husband had in 1879 practised as a physician for some years in the district of Chernigoff, European Russia. Although a liberal, Dr. B. had religiously abstained from openly expressing his views, or meddling in any way with politics, in fact had lived as a peaceful and industrious citizen in every way. In the spring of 1880, however, two young women from St. Petersburg arrived at his house with letters of introduction. They had been studying medicine at the hospitals in the capital, and finished the course of lectures, but wishing to continue their studies, called upon the doctor upon their return to their native town, to ask whether he would receive them as pupils, a proposal to which he at once assented. The girls were then introduced to his wife, who took a fancy to them, and a day

seldom passed that one or both did not visit the house.

One morning, about a month after their arrival, the doctor was visited by the police superintendent, who informed him that his young friends were political suspects, and, from information received from Petersburg, were living on forged passports. But the next piece of news fairly staggered him: the women were to be sent at once by administrative process to the village of Verkhoyansk, in the province of Yakoutsk, where in a week's time he, the doctor was, condemned to follow them for an indefinite number of years!

As is usual in such cases, a guard was put over the house, and Dr. B. forbidden to leave it. To make matters worse, his wife, a young and beautiful woman of twenty-two, was *enceinte*. But there was no help for it. The day of his departure arrived, when poor B. excused himself on the plea of going for a few days to Petersburg on business. It was only two months later, when her child was born, that Mrs. B. learnt the truth, and within a week had made up her mind to follow her husband, and start on a journey of six thousand miles before she had really recovered from her

confinement, under circumstances before which many a strong man would have quailed. Not possessing the necessary means for travelling by steamer and tarantass, Mrs. B. joined a party of exiles at Tomsk, and set out for her long, weary journey. She would, in the ordinary course of affairs, reach her destination in sixteen months, always supposing she was not taken ill on the road. For weeks, months, did her almost superhuman courage and determination sustain her, and enable her to bear the long, weary marches under a burning sun, the insufficient food, the fetid atmosphere of ostrogs, and, worse still, the insults of her male companions. For four months she struggled on, but the tax had been too great on the nervous system, and on arrival at Krasnoiarsk, her mind showed symptoms of wandering. Still the thought that every day, every hour, was bringing her nearer her husband's arms, gave her courage and additional energy, and put her in better spirits, which, alas! were soon destined to have a terrible fall. It was within three or four stages of Irkoutsk that she heard her death-warrant. "At Irkoutsk," said the poor woman one fine sunny evening when, the day's march over, she was sitting out in the prison-yard

with her fellow-prisoners, "At Irkoutsk I shall only be one hundred and eighty miles from my husband. Only fancy, in another month I may be at Verkholensk, and with him again." "Is that the Englishman who was banished from Chernigoff," asked a "political," a stranger, who had just come in from Krasnoiarsk, "if so, you will have to go a good deal further than Verkholensk to find him. Do not you know that they have sent him to Verkhoyansk, a Yakout settlement three thousand miles from Irkoutsk, within the Arctic circle?"

Within the Arctic circle! Poor soul! little as she knew Siberia, she knew what that meant; knew that to reach her husband's place of banishment she must travel weeks and months alone, in dog or reindeer sledges, through the arctic desolation and fever-stricken "Toundras" of North-Eastern Asia. Next morning, however, she resumed her march mechanically, ate and drank nothing, spoke to no one, but seemed dazed and bewildered by the blow. The very evening of the day the gang reached Irkoutsk (the city which throughout the weary pilgrimage had been her haven of hope and rest), she went raving mad, and died in the criminal asylum three days afterwards. Has any

writer of fiction ever imagined a more tragic or heart-rending story than this?

We reached Biriousinsk, a town of five thousand inhabitants, about mid-day on the 3rd of September. Gold has lately been discovered near here in large quantities. This event caused some surprise amongst the gold-workers of Tomsk and Irkoutsk, for until just lately this district had been looked upon as almost barren of mineral productions, the richest gold-fields being situated to the north of the province of Yeneseisk, Nertchirsk, in the Trans-Baikal, and Yuz, near the Altai chain, on the borders of China. The whole of Siberia, however, may be said to teem with the precious mineral, and, as a Russian once remarked to me, "Where it has not been found, it has not been looked for!" Silver, copper, and iron, are also found in large quantities in certain districts of Russian Asia, as many as 40,000 lbs. of the first-named metal being annually sent from the district of Barnaul, in South-Western Siberia, to Petersburg. On arrival, the silver is refined, and about three per cent. of gold extracted from it.

The Government gold and silver mines are worked by convicts, who receive no pay for their

labour. The private mines are mostly of gold, and are leased by Government to private individuals on certain conditions. The applicant must, however, be a Russian subject. No foreigner, although naturalized, is permitted to rent ground for gold-digging purposes. The land, once allotted, is the property of the lessor, until it has been completely worked out, or has been abandoned. It then reverts to the Crown, or if not worked by the lessor at least one out of every three years, the claim is forfeited to Government, who may let it out to another applicant. All gold must be delivered to the imperial mint at a fixed price, which leaves a good profit to the Government. Many private mines employ as many as two and even three thousand men. The Siberian peasant seldom goes to work at the diggings; he can earn far more by agriculture at home, for Siberia is as rich a country above-ground as below. The workmen employed by the mine owners are generally discharged convicts, who have been sent to Siberia for theft and other minor offences. Bad characters of all sorts—drunkards, vagabonds, the scum of Irkoutsk and Tomsk—are the kind of men who find refuge in the private gold-mines, which,

as may be imagined, are perfect pandemoniums when compared with the strict and well-regulated government establishments. The usual pay of a miner is four roubles (about 8*s.*) a month. On making the contract, however, he is paid a sum of money varying from six to ten English pounds sterling. With this he proceeds solemnly and deliberately to get drunk, nor does he desist till every penny of the "Hand-money," as it is called, is exhausted. When sufficiently sober, he is sent off with a couple of hundred companions to the diggings. The working season lasts about a hundred and twenty days, and terminates, at latest, by the 15th of September. Work commences at 3 a.m. all weathers, and is seldom finished till eight or nine o'clock at night. The workmen are, therefore, as may be imagined, well fed. Each man gets from 1½ to 2 lbs. of fresh beef per diem, salt, buckwheat, and as much black bread as he can eat. His lodgings, too, are in most cases good, and well ventilated, and every gold-mine owner is bound by Government to keep up a fully-equipped hospital, with a resident surgeon and staff of assistants on the premises. Besides the fixed rations of food, a large stock of "vodka" is also kept for the men,

who get a tumbler-full of the spirit once or twice a week, by way of warding off ague, and other malarial attacks. A pound of brick tea is also allowed each man per month. When the season is over, the majority of the gangs find their way to one of the large towns with the balance of their wages, and spend their money in drink and debauchery, till the return of the summer, and this accounts largely for the frequency of crime in Tomsk and Irkoutsk. The idea of saving money or in any way bettering his condition rarely enters the head of a Siberian gold-digger.

We were not detained long at Biriousinsk, and after a substantial breakfast of tea and boiled eggs, took the road again, and by seven o'clock that evening had rolled off nearly fifty versts. At Ilinskaya, however, we were brought to a sudden check. Our off wheel had caught fire, and it was only on discovering this that we remembered that in our eagerness to push on, we had for the last half-dozen stages neglected to oil the axles, an operation that should be performed at the very least every other stage.

We made up our minds therefore to stop the night, and push on to Kansk early the next morning,

for clouds gathering to windward looked anything but reassuring. About midnight I was awoke from a delicious dream of home and its comforts, to find a huge, shapeless fur-clad figure standing over me, and in a loud and imperious voice, commanding me to rise and get horses. "Yeshchi lochade,"[4] it yelled, as I with difficulty made out that my nocturnal visitor was a woman. Vainly I endeavoured to make her understand that I was not the post-master, but all to no purpose. The more I reasoned, the more she stormed, till even Lancaster turned uneasily in his slumbers. "Get me horses," shrieked the gorgon, "get me horses at once, or," and here she pointed dramatically to the complaint-book. At last, losing all patience, she knelt down, and seizing my shoulders, shook me with masculine force. Thinking the joke had gone a little too far, I was about to summon the post-master, when that worthy appeared. Then with true Siberian politeness, and without a word of apology, the gorgon turned upon him, a small meek man, who was utterly powerless to compete with this dread vision of the night. Her system seemed to pay, for in less than half an hou

[4] Are there any horses?

the horses were in and we heard her jingle out of the yard, leaving us to our slumbers in peace.

The rain came on a few versts from Ilinskaya with every appearance of settling in for a steady downpour. The landscape to-day was less wooded and more cultivated than any we had passed since leaving Irkoutsk. A couple of post tarantasses passed us a few versts from Kansk, returning to Ilinskaya. Their drivers were fast asleep inside, coiled up out of the rain. Our yemstchik did not attempt to wake them. Although we were on the summit of a steep hill, he gave the horses a cut over the quarters and sent them careering away down the decline full gallop. I did not see what happened. This is thought a good joke in Siberia.

Perhaps the most trying time to a beginner on wheels in Siberia is getting on board the river ferries, when each yemstchik vies with the other who shall gallop the quickest on board and pull up the shortest without going over the other side. As the ferries were invariably approached by a steep road cut down the river-bank, there was no lack of excitement on these occasions. I remember once, just before reaching Krasnoiarsk, our driver, who

was somewhat intoxicated, overshot the mark, one of his horses tumbling over the side, and only being got back with great difficulty. Rarely a day passed that one of our outside horses did not fall, once or twice at least, but no yemstchik ever pulls up for anything under a broken rein or wheel.

The post-horses are game, wiry little beasts, ranging from 14 hands 2 in. to 15 hands. Though rough and ungroomed, they are well fed, and they need be, for a rest of only six hours is allowed between the stages. In busy times, such as, for instance, the great fair of Nijni Novgorod, when traders flock to the World's Fair from all parts of Asia, many of the poor beasts die from sheer fatigue. The usual number used in a tarantass or téléga is three, or a "troika," harnessed abreast. In bad weather, when the roads are deep, four or five are used. We have had as many as seven in, and even with that number failed to progress quicker than at a walk! The harness and reins are of the most primitive description, and made of rope, while the shaft horse wears the high yoke collar, with bells attached, which seems such a useless appendage (except for the look of the thing) in Russian harness.

For cleverness I have never seen the equal of these game, wiry little animals. I recollect on one occasion (when crossing the Yenisei River) the guard-rail running round the ferry boat was quite five feet high. On disembarking, there was a scramble, for the outlet was too narrow to admit of five horses (the number we had in). Our outside horse was consequently jammed up against the rail. With a run it would have been an extraordinary jump to get over, nothing short of a miracle under present circumstances, for the other horses were plunging madly in their endeavours to get once more on to terra firma. But the little beast remained quite cool. Not in the least put out by the row and confusion, he simply reared up, rested his fore-feet on the top of the rail, and sliding over on his stomach, fell heavily in a heap on the other side. In another second he had picked himself up, and we were off again.

I was much struck by the scarcity of bay horses. All are chestnut, grey, or dun, the latter colour predominating. I did not see more than half a dozen bay horses the whole way from Irkoutsk to Tomsk; though from first to last we must have used quite four hundred, and seen four or five times that number.

The yemstchik or driver is a stupid, good-natured creature, addicted to vodka when he can get it. As the drink-money is only fifteen kopeks a stage (and many travellers do not give that), they have not much opportunity of gratifying this penchant, for tobacco runs away with most of their money. I can safely say I do not think I ever saw a yemstchik without a pipe in his mouth. Though kind to a fault to his own horses, he does not show much pity for animal life in the villages. Calves, pigs, poultry, ducks, each had their turn, and we rarely passed through a village without running over and killing something; the bigger the beast, the more pleased the driver. On such occasions, he would turn round and look at us with a smile of satisfaction, regardless of the threats and curses of the infuriated owner as he bore the maimed or defunct one into his cottage. This is another "joke" much in vogue with yemstchiks! Yet, notwithstanding all we were told, we found the Siberian yemstchik a good fellow enough, and, considering the hard work and privation he goes through, far more sober than many men in the same position in more civilized countries. Indeed he need be, for a

single accident on the road ensures instant dismissal, be it the fault of the driver or not.

We spent the night at Kansk. A mysterious and seedily dressed individual here begged to be allowed to share our tarantass and expenses as far as Krasnoiarsk, but we declined with thanks. He was a cutthroat-looking villain, and probably up to mischief, for he seemed much less keen about accompanying us on seeing we were well armed. Though we were now past the so-called "robber district," we did not relax our vigilance when travelling by night, till we reached Tomsk.

Kansk is a neat, well-built town of ten thousand inhabitants. In appearance it is an Irkoutsk in miniature, though there is more attempt at ornamentation here, some of the streets being planted with trees on either side like boulevards. The post-house, too, was comfortable, and there was a sofa therein stuffed with horsehair, an unwonted luxury in Siberia. The night's rest we looked forward to was, however, somewhat marred by a party going on in the next apartment, and given in honour of his birthday by the post-master; a party which, commencing at 9 p.m., did not break up till nearly eight the next morning, when it

was time to think of getting up and being off again. The guests were all more or less intoxicated by midnight, and kept on coming in in relays to look at us, as we lay feigning sleep, throughout the night. They did not break up till about 4 a.m., after obliging us with "Volga," the boat-song I have mentioned, at the top of their voices, and all in different keys. It was past ten o'clock next morning before the fumes of the vodka had sufficiently evaporated to enable the fuddled post-master to produce a troika. We were not sorry to make a late start, however, for the morning was bitterly cold, and the roads coated with ice, unmistakable sign of the approach of winter, and which made us doubly anxious to push on without delay to Tomsk.

The aspect of the country between Kansk and Atchinsk was, if not so picturesque, much more civilized than any we had as yet passed, the dense, thick forest being superseded by large tracts of cultivated land and fields of corn and mustard. It had frequently been a source of wonder to me that the timber of Siberia is not more largely worked; but I ascertained at Tomsk that this is forbidden by the Imperial Government. Every peasant is at liberty to cut down for his own private use as

many pine or fir trees as he likes, but the export or selling of them is strictly forbidden. This seems strange, for a brisk trade might be driven with Mongolia, where wood is invaluable, to say nothing of North China, where it is also so scarce. We passed thousands of trees killed by fires having been lighted at their foot, their trunks charred and blackened to a height of several feet, where peasants had encamped in the woods. In dry weather these occasionally set fire to neighbouring trees, and large tracts of country are devastated by the flames.

We rattled off the two hundred odd versts separating Kansk from Krasnoiarsk with but little delay, being only detained twice on the road, once at Ribinskaya, where, meeting the post, we were delayed for nine hours, and at Balanskaya, our axle having caught fire and worn down to a dangerous extent, without our being aware of the mischief. Had we known the trouble in store for us owing to this apparently trifling incident, we should not have felt so light-hearted as when, having repaired the mischief, we set off again, after a delay of seven hours, on our journey.

At four o'clock, on the afternoon of the 7th Sep-

tember, we caught sight of the blue waters of the Yenisei, winding through a fertile landscape of plain and forest, and beyond it the red cliffs of Krasnoiarsk standing out sharp and clear against the sky-line. We reached the ferry about nine o'clock that evening. The town was brightly illuminated in honour of General Ignatieff, Governor of Eastern Siberia, who was passing through from Petersburg *en route* to Irkoutsk; and I have seldom seen a prettier spectacle than the illuminations presented, the lights reflected in the dark, swift waters of the Yenisei, as we crossed it. Darkness lent enchantment to the view, however, for as we drove through the slushy, ill lit streets to the filthy hotel, we were almost sorry we had not remained over-night at Botolskaya, and gone right through the following day.

A good scrub in a bucket of water, however, worked wonders, and though the apartment given us was dirty and entirely devoid of furniture, we did ample justice to the supper of cold steret soup, beefsteak, and caviare, and bottle of claret that our host (the dirtiest man, without exception, that I have ever seen) set before us. The luxury of a change of clothes after wearing the

same for a fortnight must be experienced to be appreciated. Our bodies were literally covered with bites, and the sensation of a rest for a while from the intolerable itching and irritation of the past ten days, was worth the discomfort and annoyance one had gone through, though it was not till we were well over the Urals, and after repeated applications of carbolic acid soap, that we entirely got rid of that most pertinacious and venomous of insects, the white Siberian bug.

A visitor was announced while we were at supper. This, I may mention, is one of the chief drawbacks of Siberian travel. No matter how late the hour, or how tired he may be, every traveller is bound, by the custom of the country, to receive any one who chooses to call upon him, often enough from idle curiosity. I was told in Moscow, that such persons are often spies, employed by Government. If so, the individual who now made his appearance had a peculiar way of pursuing his calling.

M. Dombrowski was, according to his own account, a Pole, who had been banished to Tomsk for a short period, on account of an article written in a Warsaw paper. He was a tall, pale young man, with washed-out features, clad in a long black cloak about three

sizes too large for him, which he wrapped loosely about him in the fashion of a Roman toga. His official cap, with green band and button, proclaimed him a servant of the Russian Government; as we afterwards discovered, a clerk in the court-house at Tomsk.

We were both tired to death, and I felt strongly inclined to get up and kick the stranger down-stairs, when, having taken off his cap, he took his seat at the table without invitation, produced a dialogue-book, and calmly helped himself to a glass of claret. But the cool impudence of the man was amusing, too, so we made the best of it, and ordered up another bottle of wine, and a cutlet for the poor devil, who looked half starved, and as if he had lived on wood shavings for a month or two. The kindness was misplaced, for he utterly declined to leave till about 6 a.m., when we were compelled to eject him by main force, not a very difficult operation after the repeated libations of kümmel and vodka of which he had partaken at our expense. Under their influence the wretch confessed that he had never really had an idea of accompanying us to Tomsk; but the news had spread in less than half an hour, that two Englishmen had arrived in Krasnoiarsk,

and always having had an intense admiration for the English nation, our friend had determined on making our acquaintance. We had the satisfaction of paying him out and making him feel thoroughly uncomfortable once during the evening, when Lancaster, in answer to his toast of "England," responded by drinking to the health of "Poland!" "For God's sake not too loud, gospodin," said our unwelcome guest. "If those words were heard by the keeper of this hotel, they would give me another year in Siberia. There is no Poland now."

On leaving the hotel, our strange and now somewhat drunken acquaintance presented us with his card, and by the aid of a dialogue-book, essayed to convey how much he had enjoyed his evening, and morning, for the sun was now high over the house-tops. His card (a half-sheet of note-paper), bore the following inscription scrawled upon it with a lead pencil:—

"Monsieur le Gentilhomme,"
"(Noble) Dombrowski,
"Eau (sic) Palas de Justice,"
"Eau" Tomsk—
"La Siberie de Russie."

I did not think it necessary to inquire whether it

was customary for Polish noblemen to wear no shirt, eat meat with their fingers, expectorate freely during dinner, and perform various other little feats too numerous to mention. These harmless eccentricities may have been born of exile. The "Gentilhomme Noble" gave one, at any rate, a favourable idea of the capacity of his race for drinking, his share being five bottles of claret, a bottle of kümmel, and two of vodka. Bore as he was, I could not help pitying the poor wretch, who was sent to Tomsk nominally for six months, but had already been there nearly two years. His salary was, he told us, 20*l.* English per annum, and on this he had to live and clothe himself. "The criminals are better off than we, gospodin," he said, as he took leave of us. "Let them know in England how we are treated in this cursed country. How a murderer who kills his whole family, has a far easier time of it than the unhappy man or woman who ventures to stand up for the people."

Krasnoiarsk, which stands on a plain fringed by the precipitous cliffs of red earth, from which the town takes its name, is neither picturesque nor interesting. Wooden hovels here, stone palaces there, wooden pavements, oil lamps, open drains

by the roadway, deep mud in rainy weather, blinding dust in dry; dirty, greasy men, frowsy, ill-dressed women, Cossack soldiers, and occasional gangs of prisoners; such is the visible population. For one thing only is Krasnoiarsk famous: its fire brigade. There are at least thirty watch-towers in the town, and the stations are models of smartness and cleanliness. Though so frequent at Irkoutsk, Tomsk, and the other smaller towns, a bad fire here is rare.

We paid a visit while at Krasnoiarsk to the Whiteley of Siberia—one, Gadolovitch, in whose establishments at Irkoustk, Tomsk, Atchisk, Krasnoiarsk, and Tobolsk, almost anything may be purchased, from a Waterbury watch to a ship's anchor, and, curiously enough, at reasonable prices. I bought a box of revolver cartridges at Krasnoiarsk cheaper than I should have paid for them in London or Paris.

The morning of the 9th of September saw us once more *en route*. The road, after leaving the town, skirts for some distance the banks of the Yenisei river, that huge volume of water which, rising on the borders of China, traverses half Asia to discharge itself into the Gulf of Yenisei in the

Arctic Ocean, its entire length being computed to be something over three thousand miles. It is, of course, unnavigable throughout the winter, though that intrepid explorer, Captain Wiggins, has satisfactorily demonstrated that, during the summer months, water communication between England and Central Siberia is by no means impossible.

Our axle now gave us a good deal of anxiety, for before we were many miles out the tarantass was leaning over at a most uncomfortable angle. The road, too, was worse than it had been since leaving Lake Baikal, and every roll the carriage made gave us the greatest anxiety, for there was no blacksmith procurable nearer than Atchinsk, nearly two hundred versts off. It put us out of our suspense at Kosoulskaya by snapping in two altogether, although we were going at a most gingerly pace, precipitating the yemstchik into the road, where, had it not been for the hood of the tarantass, Lancaster and I should have followed him.

Here was a pretty predicament. Luckily the horses were quiet, and stood still while we scrambled out to ascertain the extent of the damage. Luckier still, we were only four versts from the

post-house—the last before Atchinsk. Lopping off a couple of stout fir boughs, our yemstchik prized the carriage up straight, and, mounting one of the horses, galloped off to Chernoyéchinsk in quest of another axle and pair of wheels, by the aid of which we might, at any rate, reach Atchinsk.

Luckily the day was fine, and though the mosquitoes were troublesome, we had plenty of cigarettes and half a dozen bottles of claret, which we had purchased at Krasnoiarsk, to while away the weary hours. Being a lonely part of the road, we loaded the revolvers, and kept them ready in case of need. Nothing passed us, however, the whole, long, weary day, from eight in the morning, when the accident occurred, till 5 p.m., but a couple of hay-carts and a gang of three hundred prisoners, most of them in chains, followed by six télégas with political prisoners, four women and two men, the latter on foot. Two of the women were young and pretty, and laughed heartily, as they passed, at our woe-begone condition, and, indeed, we must have looked somewhat ridiculous, seated in the middle of the road in our tarantass, with the hind-wheels and axle gone, propped up on a couple of fir-trees, solemnly discussing a bottle of claret!

A casual observer might have taken the political exiles for a pleasure-party, to judge from the shouts of merry laughter that rang through the forest long before they came in sight. The smart, tweed gowns and Tam-o'-Shanter hats (this seems to be the uniform of Nihilist ladies) looked strangely out of keeping with the rough wooden télégas and dirty straw on which they were seated. And yet the youngest and prettiest girl of them all was, we afterwards heard, on her way to Irkoutsk for life. She could not have been more than eighteen, and was as neatly turned out, with *gants de Suéde* and neat grey dress, as if she had come from a walk in the Bois de Boulogne or Hyde Park, instead of a long twenty-days' march from Tomsk. The men, too, were well dressed and respectable looking, though their high spirits were evidently assumed for the occasion, while those of the women were perfectly natural.

The yemstchik returned about four o'clock, accompanied by two villagers carrying an iron axle. It was a clumsy affair enough, having been taken off one of the Post télégas; but as it was only a temporary affair, this did not much signify. We arrived at Taoutinsk, the next station to Atchinsk,

at ten o'clock that night without further mishap. At times, though, the tarantass wobbled about terribly, and we constantly expected to find ourselves in the old position—feet upwards. The yemstchik who drove us the last stage could not possibly have been more than twelve years old. The stage was only sixteen versts, luckily, and I luckily kept an eye on the proceedings of our youthful jehu; for about half way, being about to descend a long and very steep hill, he got down from his box, and gravely proceeded to put the skid *behind* the front wheel instead of before the hind one!

Atchinsk is, if not the largest, decidedly the most taking town we saw in Siberia. It has a population of about ten thousand, and is built on the summits of five or six low hills. The grassy hollows between these are used as common land, where cattle, pigs, and geese roam about at will. The cheerful aspect of the place, when compared with other Siberian towns, is partly due to the fact that the soil is of a much lighter colour, and nearly all the wooden buildings are painted white or grey, picked out with bright colours. The immediate neighbourhood of Atchinsk, too,

is free of forest. The town stands in the middle of a large grass plain watered by the Chulim river—a plain composed of large enclosed grass meadows, where, as we drove by that bright sunshiny morning, cattle and sheep were browsing, knee deep in rich, luxuriant pasture, and wild flowers. Atchinsk is the one bright spot of that weary journey—an oasis of flowers and sunshine in the dark, dreary desert of gloom and monotony lying between Tomsk and Irkoutsk. The post-house was clean and roomy, the waiting-room boasting a carpet, plenty of chairs, and a sofa, while the snowy, whitewashed walls hung with bright engravings, and the windows filled with flowers, gave a cheerful look to the place that up till now I had thought impossible to find in a Siberian dwelling. We were glad of a rest of twenty-four hours here (the time necessary for the completion of our repairs), and after an excellent breakfast of caviare, fried eggs, and beef-steak, sallied out refreshed in body and mind to find a blacksmith.

The town was *en fête* for some reason or other. Bells were ringing, the houses decorated with flags and evergreens, and people all turned out

in their Sunday best. It was not reassuring, on reaching the principal square, to find that all the shops were shut, save the public houses, where crowds of natives were refreshing themselves with vodka and other spirituous liquors, preparatory to the mid-day meal. Some were drinking at the bar, others seated at the little tables by the doorway, others rolling about in the bright sunshine outside, but all, men and women, were even at this early hour—11.30 a.m.—more or less drunk.

The blacksmiths' quarter was, I found, at the other end of the town, and we had to walk nearly a mile before reaching the forge. Like many oriental towns, each trade in Atchinsk has its own street, and we found a regular colony of smithies, but all, alas! closed, and their owners either inside their houses sleeping off the effects of the previous day's debauch (the *fête* lasted two days), or laying in a fresh stock of vodka and brandy in the town. We knocked at and entered at least a dozen houses before we found a man sober enough to undertake our job. Nor would he till we had promised to pay him a ridiculously large sum in proportion to the work, and to keep him well

provided with liquor till it was finished. We regarded the wheel with some uneasiness for two or three days after, but our friend, drunk as he was, had made a good job of it, and we arrived at Tomsk without further mishap.

Leaving Atchinsk on the morning of the 11th of September, we passed the same day between Bogotolsk and Bolshoi-Kosoul, the two high brick pillars that mark the boundary of Eastern and Western Siberia. We had now entered the Government of Tomsk.

The tedium of the journey now palled on one terribly. No one can thoroughly understand the meaning of the word "monotony," who has not visited Siberia, and travelled for hour after hour, day after day, week after week, along its dark, pine-girt roads. Along the whole of the post-road from Irkoutsk, distances are marked by wooden posts, painted black and white, placed at every verst, while at every post-station a large board indicates the distance from the chief towns. My heart sank whenever I looked at these and saw the word Petersburg, with the appalling number of oughts under it. The few versts from station to station were bad enough, but when it came to the six

thousand odd separating us from Petersburg, one almost gave up all hope of ever seeing Europe again. However bright the sunshine or blue the sky, a sense of depression and loneliness hung over one, impossible to shake off. I have never, even in the depths of a Bornean forest, felt so utterly lonely and cut off from the rest of the civilized world as when crossing Siberia. It is rightly named by Russians, the land of exile and sorrow; and the dreariest days I have ever experienced were those spent in traversing the wild tract of forest and steppe between Irkoutsk and Tomsk. One chafed and fretted at first at the daily difficulties, the hours of delay passed in waiting for relays that never arrived—hours that seemed endless by day, but became maddening by night. After a time, however, one saw the folly of attempting to fight against fate, and fell into a state of reckless apathy, a condition of mind I should recommend any traveller adopting who intends crossing Siberia, I will not say with comfort, but without being positively driven out of his mind. Towards the end of our journey, nothing put us out. I verily believe if the tarantass had stood on its head, or rather

hood, we should have taken it quite as a matter of course, and remained quietly seated till it righted itself! Everything after the first week became mechanical. Drinking tea at the stations, going to sleep at a moment's notice, if there were no horses, harnessing them at once if there were, and returning to the depths of our gloomy vehicle, there to lie hour after hour, day after day, with nothing to look at but the black road and eternal pine-forests, nothing to think of save fair civilized Europe, so far away, but to which one felt with a kind of gloomy satisfaction, every jingle of the collar-bells was bringing us nearer. Even the scenery does not atone for all these drawbacks. The Siberian forests are not grand, but the trees have a dwarfish look produced by the immense plains. Not a bird, not a sound, is heard in these vast solitudes, and when the horses stop and the bells are silent, the stillness becomes almost oppressive.

Two stations after Atchinsk, the weather changed, and the second day out the rain was pouring down in sheets, with the usual result, that of wetting us through and through after the first hour. The post-houses about here were the filthiest we had as yet come across, and saving stale eggs and

sour milk, there was absolutely nothing to eat. Yet with all these *contretemps*, we could not grumble, for rain as it might, we were now safe as regards the steamer, which would soon, we thought with relief, be bearing us out of this cursed country for good and all!

There were no delays to speak of till reaching Haldiéva. But arriving here at four o'clock on the afternoon of the 14th September, we found all the horses engaged. We were now but some thirty versts from Tomsk, so could afford to wait, and change our soaking garments for dry ones. For two days and a night we had been wet through, and were chilled to the bone.

A roaring fire and three or four glasses of vodka soon put things in a rosier light, and we retired to rest with an assurance from the post-master that at 4 a.m. at latest the horses would be forthcoming, and visions of civilization and a luxurious *déjeûner à la fourchette* at Tomsk next day, mingled with our dreams, till at about 3 a.m. the sound of wheels and trampling of hoofs brought us back to reality. Looking out into the yard, I descried a confused mass of télégas and tarantasses. By-and-by a torch flashed on the gold-laced cap of a courier

standing up in a tarantass and superintending the proceedings. It was the mail! "No horses till five to-morrow afternoon, monsieur," said the old post-master, as he and the courier, a smart stalwart young fellow, armed with a long cavalry sabre and brace of revolvers, sat down to a glass of tea and cigarette while the relays were put in. A quarter of an hour more, and they were away again, leaving us to grumble and curse our ill-luck, as the sound of their collar-bells died away on the clear, frosty air.

We did not get away from Haldiéva till past 5 p.m. the following day. The clear amber light of the setting sun was flooding the dark green forest of fir-trees when we reached Semiloujnaya, the last station before Tomsk. The journey from Haldiéva had been a hard one, for the country was flooded, and the water in parts well over the axles. The last stage was a long one, twenty-nine versts, but we refused to accede to the post-master's pressing invitation to stay the night, and proceed next morning. We had good cause to regret our obstinacy ere morning. By six o'clock the relay was in, and a few minutes after we rattled out of the village, as with a loud clashing of bells the wiry little horses tore away on our last stage in Siberia,

flinging the mud and stones high in air behind them, as if in derision at the desolate and depressing country we were now (thank Heaven!) fast leaving behind us.

The sky was still grey and lowering, and the wind keen. We had now left the forest altogether, and were traversing the vast plains that encircle the capital of Western Siberia for some thirty miles on every side. There is practically no road here, the yemstchiks taking their own line, and steering for the city in their own fashion; evidently, however, our wretched driver had but a poor eye for locality, for after floundering helplessly about for three or four hours, he calmly pulled up in the middle of a huge lake of water, the overflow from a stream hard by, and confessed that he had lost his way. I looked at my watch; the hands pointed to a quarter before midnight; we had already been six hours on the way, and the horses were dead beat.

I resisted the temptation to pull the idiot off his perch and give him a sound ducking. He richly deserved it, but it would have done but little good in hastening our arrival. So we set about making casts, to use a hunting expression, and after four

hours of the coldest and most disagreeable work that has ever fallen to my lot, a thin bright streak appeared on the horizon. We led the horses all this time, be it mentioned, and were as often as not up to our waists in the pools of icy cold water that covered the marshy plain. But the longest lane must have a turning, and by three o'clock we were rolling wearily through the silent and deserted streets of Tomsk.

"Nothing but distance now separates us from England," I thought as we entered the portals of the comfortable Hôtel d'Europe, "and what is distance when steam is at hand to overcome it!" We turned into a real bed two hours later (with sheets and pillow-cases), and felt, after an excellent supper, contented, not to say triumphant. Trouble, privation, filthy post-houses, "katorgi," were now things of the past, but as I sank into the deep and dreamless sleep that a man can only know who has passed twenty-two days out in the open, half starved, and wet through the greater part of the time, the thought uppermost in my mind was: "Not for a king's ransom would I do this journey again."

List of Post Stations (with Distances, Telegraph Stations, and Rivers), between Irkoutsk and Tomsk, Siberia.

(G.) Good Post-house. (B.) Bad Post-house. (F.) Uninhabitable.

	VERSTS
Irkoutsk. (Telegraph Station. Ferry over River Angara.) Good hotel.	
Bokofskaya (G.) . .	13
Soukovskaya. (G.) . .	21
Tilminskaya. (B.) . .	27
Maltinskaya. (G.) . .	21
Polovilnaya. (G.) . .	29
Cheremoffskaya. (G.) .	18
Koutoulik. (B.) . .	28
Zalarinsk. (B.) . .	30
Tiretskaya. *River Oka dangerous. Cross by day.* (B.) . . .	22
Ziminskaia. (G.) . .	25
Kinultinskaya. Telegraph Station. (G.) . .	30
Listvinskaya. (G.) . .	20
Kouitoungskaya. (B.) .	18
Tilinskaya. (F.) . .	23
Cheragilskaya. (B.) .	18
Touloung. (B.) . .	26
Kourjinskaya. (B.) .	25
Shabartinskaya. (G) .	21
Houdalanskaya. (G.) .	21
Kirgitoulskaya. (F.) .	26
Nijni Udinsk. Telegraph Station. (G.) .	21
Oukovskaya. (F.) . .	28
Kamoushetzkaya. (G.) .	17½
Zamtovskaya. (G.) .	24
Alzaminskaya. (G.) .	25
Rasgonnaia. (B.) . .	19½
Bayeronovskaya. (G.) .	25
Biriousinsk. (G.) . .	21
Polovina. (G.) . .	23
Kloutchinskaya. (B.) .	19
Tinskaya. (G.) . .	28
Nijni-Gatchefskaya. (G.)	25
Ilianskaya. (B.) . .	26
Kansk. Telegraph Station and River. (G.) .	27
Bolshoirinskaya. (B.) .	25
Klontchefskaya. (B.) .	22
Borodinskaya. (B.) .	16
Ribinskaya. (G.) . .	16
Ouyarskaya. (B.) . .	26
Balaiskaya. (B.) . .	24
Tertege. (G.) . .	17
Kokinskaya. (G.) . .	14
Botoiskaya. (B.) . .	25
Krasnoiarsk. Telegraph Station. Ferry over Yenisei River, and Fair Inn. . . .	29
Zaldievka. (B.) . .	21
Sokofskaya. (G.) . .	18
Malokemchougsk. (B.) .	18

	VERSTS		VERSTS
Ivrulskaya. (B.) . .	21½	Tiajniskaya. (G.) . .	16
Bolshitiemshimsk. (Ferry). (G.) . .	16	Souslofkaya. (G.) . .	28
Kasoulskaya. (G.) . .	16	*Marinsk.* Telegraph Station and Ferry. (G.) .	24
Chernoyéchinsk. (G.) .	22	Podielnichnaya (G.) .	23
Taoutinsk. (B.) . .	16	Birikoulskaya. (B.) .	28
Atchinsk. Telegraph Station and Ferry. (G.) .	16	Potchitansk. (F.) . .	27
Bieloyarski. (G.) . .	13	Kolinskaya. (G.) . .	23
Krasnoiejinska. (G.) .	17	Ichimskaya. (F.) . .	22
Bogotolsk. (G.) . .	30	Trountaiva. (F.) . .	22
Bolshoi-Kosoul. (B.) .	16	Haldiéva. (B.) . .	22
Itatskaya. (B.) . .	18	Semiloujnaya. (B.) .	14
Pomejoutotchnaya. (F.)	17	*Tomsk.* Telegraph Station. Good Inn. .	29

Price of posting: Horses three kopeks, a verst each from *Irkoutsk* to *Bogotolsk*. From Bogotolsk to Tomsk, 1½ kopeks a verst.

CHAPTER XI.

TOMSK.

THE city of Tomsk, which is situated on the river Tom, a branch of the Obi, contains over 40,000 inhabitants. Though scarcely as large as Irkoutsk, it is a more imposing place at first sight. The streets are broad and, though unpaved, in good order, notwithstanding the incessant stream of caravan traffic that pours through them in the tea season. The public buildings are fine, even handsome (of two, three, and four stories high), without the draggled, unfinished appearance of those at Irkoutsk and Krasnoiarsk, and there are shop-windows to enliven the appearance of the principal thoroughfares.

The steamer was not to leave for two days, a time we devoted to unpacking and overhauling our clothes. We found them in a sorry plight, while the leather portmanteaus were swollen like drowned dogs after the pitiless storms of rain. We also took the opportunity of writing home to announce

our safe arrival so far. Posting letters in Siberia is somewhat wearisome. It took us nearly half an hour to despatch them, and then only by the aid of a Polish interpreter called in by the landlord of the Hotel. I signed my name at least six times before the necessary formalities were completed. Then, would I have them sent with one stamp or two? If the latter and the letter were lost, I might claim ten roubles from the Government, said the hotel-keeper, "Which you probably wouldn't get," added the Pole; so I trusted to Providence and sent them with one. All were opened several times by the authorities, one reaching London with no less than five different seals upon it.

Tomsk is built in two parts. The lower portion of the town, consisting nearly exclusively of merchants' offices, shops, and warehouses, while on the heights overlooking them are the Governor's palace, Government offices, and private residences of the better class of merchants. But although, as I have said, Tomsk is less depressing than other Siberian cities, the absence of trees or gardens gives the place the usual bare, cheerless appearance. The surrounding country is flat and marshy, and a fruitful cause of malaria and fever during spring and autumn.

The summer is the busy season, when the tea from China and Trans-Baikalian merchandise is unloaded from the small carts which have brought it from Irkoutsk, Kiakhta, Stratensk, &c., and shipped on the steamers running by the Tom and Obi rivers to Tiumen. Just outside the town is a huge plain cut up in all directions by caravan roads, and at the extremity of which are the wharves where steamers lie to receive their cargoes. A dreary, desolate place it looked, the dull, wintry day we saw it, but in summer the whole place is alive with caravan carts, while in dry weather an eternal dust-cloud hangs like a pall over the huge plain. The railway which is now being projected between Tomsk and Irkoutsk, will do away with all this. This line completed, the tea will be sent to Wladivostok from China by sea, thence to Stratensk by the Amour river, and on by rail from Irkoutsk to Tomsk and European Russia.

The Hôtel d'Europe afforded us very fair accommodation (for Siberia). The cooking was excellent, and we managed to make ourselves comfortable enough. Tomsk is famed for two delicacies, sterlet and caviare. I have seldom tasted anything to equal

the former in flavour, and the caviare, fresh from the fish and eaten a couple of hours after it had been taken, was food for the gods, and as unlike the potted abomination sold in England as can well be imagined. In all other respects, however, the hotel was sadly deficient. Our room swarmed with vermin, and there was not a bath to be had in the place for love or money; the only washing appliance in the hotel being a small tin vessel nailed up against the wall of the corridor, and holding about a pint, a small tap turning on a tiny, trickling stream of water, which ran over one's hands and on to the floor. I asked our host why he did not provide washhand basins for his customers. "They are so dirty," was the reply, "half the time you are washing your hands in dirty water. By our plan it runs over you fresh and clean!"

We attended a performance at the Opera House of "Barbe Bleu," but it was poorly performed, and the artists very inferior to those of Irkoutsk. The streets of Tomsk are, unlike those of Irkoutsk, fairly safe after dark, for they are well lit by gas and patrolled throughout the night by a strong force of police. Although invited to a public ball the third evening of our stay, we were unable to

put in an appearance, having so many arrangements to make, and the steamer leaving at 4 a.m. the following day. With previous experiences of the manners and customs of Siberians after 12 a.m., we determined not to risk losing it. They must be amusing sights, these Siberian dances. It is not customary to walk about a ball-room, even in the intervals of dancing. Each guest moves about with a sort of dancing step, *à la Polonaise.* Judging from their evening parties, a Siberian ball-room must become a very fair imitation of a bear garden towards the small hours of the morning, and we were perhaps fortunate in having stayed away.

One is struck at Tomsk by the number of well-turned-out carriages and horses in the streets though the "droshki" or public vehicles are rough, uncomfortable things, in shape something like an Irish jaunting car, with a seat about half a yard broad, to hold two persons sitting back to back. They are not built high from the ground, luckily, for the yemstchiks are perfectly indifferent as to whether their passengers fall out or not, and whirl round corners in the most reckless way. Although the male population are of the same

sulky, hangdog-looking appearance as we saw at Irkoutsk, the women were distinctly pretty, and the majority extremely well dressed. But few affected the Siberian costume, the long cloak and white head-handkerchief, so much in vogue in Eastern Siberia, but the smart gowns and neat figures encountered in the streets pleasantly recalled one to the fact that we were once more nearing civilization. I saw women in the Grande Rue of Tomsk, who would have been considered pretty and well dressed in Bond Street, but these were only amongst the upper classes. The peasantry, male and female, are, with few exceptions, hideous.

It says little, however, for the intelligence or civilization of the population of both Tomsk and Irkoutsk, that we were unable to procure a single French or German book at either city. We had not had a single book of any kind to read since leaving Pekin, and were naturally anxious to get something to lighten the tedious and weary hours that lay between us and Tiumen, but, search as we might, could discover no French or German, to say nothing of English, work of any kind. A university has since been founded at Tomsk, and matters may have improved in this respect,

but it seemed strange that in a population of nearly fifty thousand souls (many of whom spoke German) there should have been nothing but Russian works obtainable. Although art of all kinds is at a low ebb in most of the Siberian towns, there is one thing in which they certainly do excel—in photography. For clearness and finish some of their productions are equal to those of the best photographers in London or Paris, notably those of Bogdanovitch in Irkoutsk. I was told by the latter that the best are taken in winter time, when the clear, rarefied atmosphere and dazzling sunshine offer excellent opportunities for obtaining good negatives.

We were somewhat staggered by the hotel bill presented us by the host of the Hôtel d'Europe, the total amounting to two hundred and seventy roubles (or nearly 30*l.*) for barely four days' bed and board. In vain I protested against the enormity of the items (not one of which, by the way, could I read), in vain threatened sooner than be thus swindled, to stop in Tomsk and bring the matter before a court of justice. But the old Jew was inexorable, and only smiled blandly and rubbed his hands, murmuring now and then, "The gospodin must not lose his temper." He

laughed outright at my threat of bringing the matter into court, his amusement being accounted for by the interpreter, who told us that he, being the chief magistrate, would himself have tried the case. To make matters worse, we had that morning sold the old rascal our tarantass for sixty roubles (about one-third of its real value), on the express understanding that he would charge as little as possible for accommodation.

We set out at 4 a.m. on the morning of the 19th of September for the steamer. Our way was fraught with considerable difficulty, for it was as dark as pitch out on the plain, which was covered in places with deep holes and pitfalls. Though only four versts, it took two hours to do the distance, and we were right glad when, a little before daybreak, the green and red lights of the *Kazanetse* shone out bright and clear, while at the same time her steam whistle sounded for departure, recalling us to the fact that we were now no longer at the mercy of drunken drivers and broken-down axles, but well within reach of Europe by means of that blessed invention, steam!

The *Kazanetse* would have been a fairly comfortable boat anywhere. To us, fresh from the

discomforts of the road, she seemed positively luxurious. The fleet to which she belonged is one of fourteen vessels, each ranging from one hundred and fifty to two hundred tons, and owned by two private individuals, Messrs. Kourbatoff and Ignatoff, who have the contract for carrying mails and prisoners. These vessels are built at Tiumen, and on the same model, the first-class accommodation forward, the roof of the saloon forming an upper deck, while abaft the funnel the decks are roofed over with iron for deck passengers, of whom, on the *Kazanetse*, there were some three hundred returning to various parts of the Obi district before the closing of that river for navigation. The merchandise is towed in lighters of two and three hundred tons, though drawing but two or three feet of water, for in parts even this huge stream becomes dangerously shallow in the summer months. The steamers burn wood, carried on the deck of the lighters, the consumption per diem being sometimes as much as eighty tons!

It was with a sense of relief that we woke next day to hear the paddle-wheels dashing through the water, and the little steamer shaking with the speed at which she was being driven through the

grey misty morning. As usual, washing appliances were *nil*, but after a steaming glass of tea and two or three "Kalatchi"[1] and preserves, we found no difficulty in dispensing with such minor details, and felt as we had not once felt since leaving Irkoutsk; thoroughly comfortable. A coal-barge would have been a relief after the incessant shaking and bumping of those fifteen hundred miles. I thought with a shudder how, had we been delayed a week later, we should in a few more days have been ploughing through the deep muddy roads and flooded plains to Tiumen, a distance of quite one thousand versts. Though that by river is nearly four thousand, we would have chosen it, had it been double or treble the distance, in preference to the leaky, bone-shaking tarantass, a vehicle the very name of which I shall ever recall with a shudder!

But though one felt thoroughly at rest, the unvarying monotony on board the *Kazanetse* was trying enough, and the winding stream, flat, muddy banks, and slow-going steamer grew intensely depressing after the first two days. The Obi river is neither grand nor picturesque. It is at all seasons a cheerless, dispiriting landscape that

[1] A kind of oatmeal cake.

meets the eye from Tomsk to Soorgoot, but in late autumn its banks must present the appearance of a howling wilderness. There are few rivers in the world with as many tributaries, or of the same enormous length, as the Obi. The basin of the river contains more than a million and a quarter of square miles, an area nearly two thousand miles in length, and, at the widest part, twelve hundred in breadth. From near the Chinese border, where it has its source, to the Gulf of Obi in the Frozen Ocean, it has over seventy tributaries, not including the Tom and Irtish Rivers, the source of the latter being Lake Zaizan, near the Koochoom Mountains in Chinese Tartary. An idea may thus be gained of what a stupendous volume of water this is. A few days above Tomsk, it presents more the appearance of a succession of large lakes than a river—lakes fringed with low banks of stunted fir and beech-trees, varied by occasional stretches of sandy waste. Early autumn is, perhaps, the best time to see the Obi, for at this season the varied hues of decaying vegetation give a more or less varied look to the dull landscape of dirty green and drab that stretches away, without hut or habitation to mar its solitude, from its shores to those of

the Arctic Ocean. The end of October, sees the Obi covered with ice, and no longer navigable. For a great part of the year, however, the water flows on under the ice, which, even as far south as Tiumen, is from three to four feet thick. Navigation is sometimes entirely suspended in twenty-four hours, so suddenly does winter come on. It must not, however, be imagined that the frozen rivers of Siberia present the smooth, unbroken surface of glassy ice which one sees depicted in English pictures, presumably by artists who have never been nearer Siberia than Moscow or Petersburg. The Obi, with its impetuous torrent, is, perhaps, the most uneven and rugged of any; but even on the Yenisei, which is less rapid, it is common enough in winter to see hillocks and miniature cliffs twenty to thirty feet in height, thrown up by the current upon its frozen surface. The effect, with a blue sky and brilliant sunshine, is, I was told, very beautiful; but on dull, days (which, happily for Siberians, are rare), the sight of a frozen, deserted river must be melancholy in the extreme.

We passed but two towns worthy of the name between Tomsk and Tiumen — Soorgoot and

Tobolsk. The villages touched at were simply a collection of half a dozen log huts, the dwellings of the employés of the steamboat company, and depôts for the firewood used by their vessels. Of the nomadic tribes inhabiting the banks of the Obi, we saw but little, most of them having already struck their birch-bark tents, and migrated north to their winter-quarters and reindeer. Occasionally, however, we passed an Ostiak encampment, with its half-dozen grimy-looking, triangular tents, savage dogs, and fleet of canoes. The Ostiaks inhabit the vast tract of country lying between the Obi and the shores of the Frozen Ocean. Like the Yakoutz, their neighbours, the Ostiaks subsist entirely upon what they kill. Fish in summer, and game in winter. Like the Yakoutz also, scurvy and a still more loathsome disease, introduced by Russian traders, is slowly but surely stamping them out. They are a good-tempered, hospitable people, fond of trade, but averse to anything like hard work. In summer, when, between the months of June and August, night is unknown in these regions, their chief occupation is fishing, the produce of their nets being salted and sent on to Tobolsk for export to

Tiumen, Ekaterinburg, Perm, and European Russia. The Ostiaks number about thirteen thousand in all, and are miserable creatures to look at, with a yellowish complexion, flat faces, and coarse, dark hair. They are, especially skilful in the use of the bow. In shooting squirrels, for instance, they use a blunt arrow, and are careful to hit the animal only on the head, so as not to injure the fur.

During summer, the Ostiaks live entirely upon fish, during the winter months their sole diet is reindeer milk. The costume is not an ungraceful one, and is made of reindeer skin trimmed with bright red or blue cloth and coloured beads, some of the richer ones being hung round with small silver coins, Russian twenty-kopek pieces, &c. It is never safe to approach their encampments alone. I did so once, and had cause to repent it, being attacked by half a dozen huge dogs, who would have made short work of me, had not an old Ostiak woman emerged from a tent upon hearing the disturbance, and beaten them off. The Ostiak breed of dog is not unlike the Mongolian. They are sharp-looking, sagacious creatures of a black and white colour, and are by nature the cleanest that exist, going daily of their

own accord to the river and bathing throughout the summer months. In winter they roll themselves in the snow. I thought of buying and bringing one home, but that it would have been a nuisance and expense through Europe.

We anchored one evening off an Ostiak encampment and paid its inmates a visit. It was a curious, weird scene, the broad, sullen-looking river, the crimson sunset through the dark-green fir-trees, the two or three flimsy, tumble-down tents with columns of thin grey smoke rising into the still evening air, while a number of silent, skin-clad forms flitted noiselessly about, getting in the nets and canoes for the night, on the low sandy spit that ran for some yards into the river. Not a sound broke the stillness, for we were quite half a mile from the steamer, and save for the wash and ripple of the stream, the occasional bay of a dog, or cracking of sticks as one of the women gathered fuel for the night, all was silent as the grave. I have never seen a picture of more utter desolation. We intended to enter one of their dwellings, but beat a hasty retreat on coming within ten or fifteen yards of them. The stench was overpowering, and I am

not exaggerating when I say that one may smell an Ostiak quite a quarter of a mile off with the wind in the right quarter! It is a smell peculiar to their race, so sickening and overpowering, that I cannot describe it. Russians ascribe it to their invincible repugnance to salt. None will touch it, although it has several times, and at great expense, been distributed amongst them by the Government; and this is no doubt the cause of the majority of the loathsome diseases from which they suffer. Some of the men were pleasant-looking fellows, and their women would have been pretty had they possessed any teeth, which, after the age of fourteen or fifteen, usually loosen and drop out from the same cause. Unlike their neighbours the Samoyédes, the Ostiaks are kind to their women. In no race in the world is woman so badly treated as among the former. To be enceinte, even legally, is considered degrading, and the unfortunate mothers are beaten and worried incessantly during the time of pregnancy, and until their child is born. During this period, too, they are tortured until they confess with whom they have been unfaithful, very often naming an utterly innocent person to escape further torment. When they have done so, there is no

great result; the husband simply claiming a small sum of money (or its equivalent in fur or brandy) as damages! I was much struck with the likeness between the Ostiaks, as regards their appearance and habits, and the Dyaks of Central Borneo, although of course the latter are a much finer race, both as regards physique and intellect. The dug-out canoes used on the Obi are the same identically in shape and construction, while on the handles of the paddles I found much the same patterns of carving that I had come across among some of the inland tribes in Borneo. This is indeed a case of "extremes meeting."

The shores of the Obi river teem with game and wild fowl. I must have seen quite a million duck during the journey from Tomsk to Tobolsk, while in the season wild geese, teal, widgeon, and snipe abound; and I was somewhat surprised to see quantities of sea-gull at this distance from the ocean. There is no lack, either, of bear and wolf in these regions, and smaller ground game, and for one who cared for sport, I can imagine no better hunting-ground. But he would be a bold man who would pitch his tent among this unsavoury

race for two or three months. To say nothing of their filthy habits, the tents are seldom free from smallpox.

There were but six first-class passengers besides ourselves on the *Kazanetse*. M. Sourikoff, a painter of some renown in Russia, his pretty wife, and two little girls, Olga and Hélène, models in miniature of their mother, who were returning from Tomsk to Moscow, after a somewhat extended tour in Siberia, in search of peasant types for a new historical picture, since completed with great success by M. Sourikoff. It was pleasant, indeed, to make the acquaintance of these charming people, who were true Russians (*not* Siberians), and the long dull evenings passed quickly enough. Although M. Sourikoff spoke but a few words of French, madame was half a Parisienne, and returned every year, for a few weeks to the lovely city she had forsaken for the fogs and mists of Petersburg. We thus had many subjects in common, and this was undoubtedly the pleasantest part of our journey.

There is no fixed time for meals on board these boats. You order your food when and where you like, so passengers are but little thrown together, and as the two remaining ones never appeared to

take nourishment at all, or join the Sourikoffs and ourselves at dinner or breakfast, we did not make their acquaintance. They were a queer couple too, one an old gentleman of semi-military appearance, who paced up and down deck all day, wet or dry, smothered up in furs, and seemed to subsist solely on suction. I never saw him eat, but he consumed at least twenty bottles of beer a day, to say nothing of nips of vodka and glasses of tea between whiles. His official cap and numerous decorations gave him the appearance of a general at least. We put him down as returning from an important Siberian military command, and were somewhat surprised to hear at Tiumen that he was a simple government inspector of mines in Siberia, and a civilian. Where he got the medals remains a mystery. Our other fellow-passenger was a lady who might have been any age from twenty to fifty, and whose movements and manner were so singular and weird that Madame Sourikoff christened her "The Sphinx." She usually spent the whole day locked up in her cabin. It was only at night that she emerged, muffled up in furs, and thick veils, to pace the solitary deck till long after midnight. Only once did I catch a glimpse of her face, a pale and determined, though sad one, framed with jet black

hair cut short and square over the temples. When alone one moonlight night, smoking a cigar on deck, I ventured to address the mysterious stranger in French, a language she understood perfectly. Her history was sad enough. She had left her home near Nijni Novgorod "under suspicion" two years ago, a girl of eighteen, to return an old woman. Most of her term of exile had been passed at Krasnoiarsk. It was only at Tomsk that she had learnt the death of her mother, and that her fiancé, who had vowed to wait for her return, had married another. "I have nothing to live for now, monsieur," sobbed the poor woman, "for my step-father was the means of my being sent to that hell upon earth. Let me only ask you to keep my secret, and tell no one on board I have spoken to you. I do not wish for society——I cannot stand it." Poor soul! I have often since wondered what became of her; whether she returned to a fairly contented, though broken life, or, as is more often the case, lived but to welcome the day when death should end her troubles, and let her forget that she had ever been sent to accursed Siberia.

The cuisine on board the *Kazanetse* was excellent,

a pleasant change from the eternal *menus* of the past six weeks, "Yaitse," "Chi," and "Moloko."[2] The "Rabchick" formed part of our daily bill of fare. This is a bird peculiar to Russia and Siberia, something similar to a partridge, and excellent eating. When struggling with the bill of fare, I often thought of a poor Frenchman who left Moscow for Irkoutsk two years since—completely ignorant of the Russian language—and who was told by a friend whenever he felt hungry merely to mention the word "Teliatina," and they would bring him anything worth eating. Things went well till he reached Tobolsk, when it suddenly dawned upon the poor wretch that all the animal food he had eaten since leaving the Holy City had been composed solely of *veal!* By the time our friend reached Tomsk he was fairly rabid. Veal is an excellent thing in its way, but "toujours veau," like "toujours perdrix," is apt to pall upon the palate after a few weeks! It was only at Tomsk that he came across a French-speaking Cossack officer who was able to change his bill of fare, and history relates that the victim was so overcome with

[2] Eggs, tea, milk.

emotion and gratitude that he fell upon his deliverer's neck and wept for joy!

One is out of it on board a Siberian river-steamer if one does not eat nuts, for every one devours day and night, hour after hour, a small kind of cob-nut, very common in Siberia, which to my taste was extremely insipid and flavourless. But we were told by the Sourikoffs it was the proper thing to do, so purchased a pound or so at the first stopping-place, and followed the example of our fellow-passengers. Every one devoured them, from the captain downwards. Even the melancholy exile had her bag of "brousniki," as they are called, and the beer-drinking inspector furtively produced them every now and then from the depths of his fur-lined "dacha." When the Siberian is unable to obtain these, he chews a kind of elastic composition made of turpentine, not unpleasant to the taste. The Russians call this "Conversation Sibérienne," hardly a compliment to the conversational powers of the inhabitants of Asiatic Russia.

From the day we left Samarof, our northernmost point, the weather became cold and raw, so much so that furs were a daily as well as nightly necessity. Cold and blinding showers of hail and sleet kept us

prisoners in the little stuffy saloon of the steamer, and we passed the days sadly enough, staring out of the misty windows at the flat, muddy banks, watching the grey, woolly clouds as they swept across the desolate-looking plains. We had now entered the river Irtish, where navigation is extremely dangerous at this time of the year on account of the dense fogs that prevail between Soorgoot and Tobolsk. Collisions are of frequent occurrence, and it is not to be wondered at. There is no rule of the road as at sea or on most European rivers. Upon meeting a vessel a red or white flag was waved from the bridge to intimate that we should pass to the right or left of it. At night the signal was given by a small hand-lamp. On foggy days and dark misty nights the danger of this system may be imagined, and we got but little sleep at nights for fear of a smash, to say nothing of a deafening fog-horn kept going almost without cessation from sunset till dawn. We only anchored once, however, when the fog became so bad you could literally not see your hand before you. It lasted seven hours, as uncomfortable ones as I ever wish to spend, for eyes, nose, and mouth were choked with the fumes which

penetrated even into the saloon. The scenery for a couple of days after leaving Soorgoot was still more desolate and monotonous. The forests of birch and beech disappeared altogether, and were replaced by vast plains of sand, varied by an occasional salt-marsh, the only signs of vegetation being the stunted willows and scrub that fringed the banks of the dirty, muddy-coloured river. Not a living thing is seen in these regions, save at long intervals, perhaps, the encampment of some Ostiak, the tiny tents only accentuating the huge landscape of desolation surrounding it. It gives me the blues even now to recall the shores of the Obi and Irtish on a dull day.

We reached Tobolsk at 5 p.m. on the 25th of September. The night before, just as we were sinking into a sweet sleep, we were all roughly tumbled out of our berths and ordered on deck. "It's come at last," said Lancaster, who, like myself, had made up his mind that an accident had happened, for there was a tremendous turmoil and scurrying about on deck, and, looking out of the little port-hole, I made out the red and green lights of a large steamer close alongside. Sourikoff was already on deck. Poor Madame S.

and little Olga and Hélene were sitting on a pile of luggage, their teeth chattering and faces blue with the cold. "Is it not disgraceful?" said the poor little lady, "we have to change steamers." The winter-quarters of the *Kazanetze* were, it appeared, at Tomsk; those of the *Reutern*, the steamer we had just met, at Tobolsk. The latter, having been delayed by the fogs for nearly four days, would not have time to return to her winter port before the closing of the navigation. "The intention was," said the captain, "to change us at Soorgoot, but these cursed fogs have thrown out all the company's arrangements."

We certainly got the worst of the bargain. The *Reutern* was of precisely the same dimensions as the *Kazanetze*, and whereas we had but eight first-class passengers all told, she carried sixty or seventy natives of Tomsk, and other river-side towns, who were hurrying back to their homes before the freezing of the Obi. The saloon of the *Reutern* was, as may be imagined, in a truly disgusting state. The tables covered with grease and cigarette ash, the floor strewn with chicken bones, egg shells, pieces of bread, squashed berries, &c., and although it was past midnight, a great

many of the passengers must have been indulging in a meal at the time the *Kazanetse* hove in sight, for the smell of grease and cooking was intolerable, the windows of the saloon having evidently been closed ever since the *Reutern* had left Tobolsk. The Siberians have queer notions of eating, and their meals correspond very much with their unfinished mode of life. While on their travels they feed anyhow, no matter how great the facility for obtaining food at proper hours. You will see them, men, women, and children alike, subsist throughout the day solely on tea, bread, or sweet biscuits and berries, and then, as if struck by a sudden happy thought, rouse themselves about midnight, and sit down to a heavy meal of two or three courses, washed down by copious draughts of scalding tea, and preceded by three or four large glasses of vodka. Cigarettes are incessantly smoked during meals. Cigars are unobtainable in Siberia. I tried one at Tomsk, but felt the effects for days afterwards. Russian cigarettes are, in my opinion, better than the Egyptian. They are more aromatic, and certainly less injurious. Those made by Laferme under the name of "Petits canons," are the best, and are to be bought almost everywhere throughout the Russian Empire, from

Kiakhta to Petersburg, Archangel to Merv. They are a beautifully made cigarette, and the price (one rouble a hundred) is reasonable enough.

The approach to Tobolsk is picturesque. One felt, on looking at the villages in the suburbs, with their green church spires and neat white-washed houses, large fields, and grazing-grounds, enclosed by neat wooden railings, that one was indeed approaching civilization. For some two miles before reaching the town itself, the river is lined by rocky, precipitous cliffs topped with dense forests of pine. Here and there huge land-slips had taken place. In one instance nearly a quarter of a mile square had sunk bodily into the river, trees and all, looking at the point where it had broken away as clean cut as if it had been done with a knife. The Irtish River is very subject to these convulsions of nature. Its banks in 1753 fell a depth of nearly seventy feet.

Tobolsk is distinctly the prettiest town in Siberia, though perhaps the fact of our being so pleased with it was not altogether unassociated with the thought that it was the last Siberian city (except Tiumen) that we should visit. On first appearance one is reminded not a little of Gibraltar;

one portion of the town being built on a steep cliff, the other on the marshy plain, watered by the winding yellow Irtish, and its smaller tributary, the Tobol river. We were to start again at midnight, so lost no time in landing and making an excursion round the city.

It will give the reader some idea of the size of Siberia, when I say that the district or government of Tobolsk alone is nearly eight times as large as Great Britain and Ireland. The population of this vast province are for the most part Russians, Tartars, Ostiaks, and Samoyedes, the two latter aboriginal tribes. The city of Tobolsk was for a long time the capital of the whole of Eastern and Western Siberia, and is rich in historical associations. It belonged up to 1581 to the Tartars, and was then known under the name of Isker, the governor or ruler of the province being a Tartar chief of the name of Kootchoom.

It may be said that Siberia was practically unknown to the inhabitants of European Russia up to the middle of the sixteenth century, for although, previously to this, an expedition had penetrated as far as the Lower Obi, yet its effects were not permanent. Later on, Ivan Vassilovitch II. sent a

body of troops across the Ourals, laid some of the Tartar tribes under tribute, and assumed the title of "Lord of Siberia." Kootchoom Khan, however, a descendant of Chenghiz Khan, punished these tribes for their cowardice, regained their fealty, and thus put an end to further encroachments from Russia. A second invasion, however, ended more favourably for Russian interests, and in a totally unexpected manner. Ivan II. had extended his conquests to the Caspian Sea, and opened up trade with Persia. The merchants and caravans were, however, frequently pillaged by hordes of banditti called Don Cossacks, whom the Czar was finally compelled to attack, killing many, and making prisoners of many more. Some escaped; among the latter being some five hundred freebooters, under the command of a chief named Yermak Timoffeef, who, making their way to Orel, heard of an inviting field of adventure lying east of the Oural mountains. It is not generally known that the enormou country known as Asiatic Russia was conquered and annexed by five hundred men. Yermak, himself an outlaw, conquered, after a desperate battle, the Tartar hordes of Kootchoom Khan, then prince of the Tobolsk province, and became in twenty-four

hours transformed from a lawless robber into a prince. But he had the good sense, notwithstanding, to see that he could not hope to hold his enormous empire without assistance. He sent, therefore, fifty of his Cossacks to the Czar of Russia, their chief being ordered to represent to that monarch the progress which the Russian troops under the command of Yermak had made in Siberia, where an extensive empire had been conquered in the name of the Czar. The latter, delighted beyond measure at this fresh acquisition of territory, gave the rebel Yermak free pardon, and at once sent him money and assistance. Reinforced by five hundred Cossacks, Yermak renewed his efforts, formed fresh expeditions, and was enabled to subdue and conquer fresh districts, which had been fomented and incited to rebellion by the conquered Kootchoom Khan. In one of the smaller engagements, Yermak perished, not, it is said, by the sword of the enemy, but, having to cut his way to the water's edge, he essayed to jump into a boat, and stepping short, fell into the water, when the weight of his armour drowned him.

The stream of conquest flowed apace after the death of Yermak, whose name will live for ever in

Russia as one of the greatest benefactors of that country. Tomsk was founded in 1604, and from thence new expeditions were formed by the Cossacks, with the result that Yeneseisk was founded in 1619, and a few years afterwards the city of Krasnoiarsk. Crossing the Yenisei river, the invading army advanced to the shores of Lake Baikal, and in 1620 attacked, and conquered, the populous nation of the Bouriattes. Then, making for the north, they founded Yakoutsk in 1632, and subjugated, though not without difficulty, the powerful Yakout tribe. Having accomplished this, the troops crossed the Aldan mountains, and in 1639 reached the sea of Okhotsk. Thus in less than seventy years was added to the Russian Empire a territory as large as the whole of Europe, whose ancient capital was Tobolsk—thus was an empire comprising nearly the half of Asia conquered and annexed by a simple Cossack and five hundred men. Ought not this to warn us that Russian enterprise is not a thing to be thought lightly of; that in most cases what a Russian, be he noble or moujik, has said "I will do," he does, be it at the cost of his life.

In the public gardens of Tobolsk is a monument of grey granite, about fifty feet in height, which

was erected in 1839. On the base is inscribed, in gold letters, the words, "To Yermak! Conqueror of Siberia."

It was getting dusk when we landed, and, hiring droshkis, we set out with the Sourikoffs for a drive through the town. The Tobolsk droshki is a terrible vehicle, a miniature jaunting car built to hold two, and drawn by a horse three or four times too large for it. There is nothing to hold on by, not even a guard-rail, and as the streets of Tobolsk are anything but smooth, and our yemstchik drove at full gallop, it became a matter of considerable difficulty to stick to the ship, especially as my companion was a somewhat stout man, and took up more than two-thirds of the seat. I was not sorry when, the drive over, we arrived at the summit of the hill whereon stands the governor's and archbishop's palaces, and cathedral, the latter a fine building in the Byzantine style.

The city of Tobolsk has a population of about 30,000,[3] and covers an area four versts long

[3] It is curious to note that, in 1761, the Abbé d'Autroche found the population of Tobolsk to be 15,000 souls; in 1861, exactly one hundred years later, it was only 16,000.

by about three broad. Although many stone buildings are springing up in various parts of the city, most of those in the lower town or mercantile parts are of wood. Many of the streets, though narrow and irregular, are paved completely with wooden planks laid crosswise, so that the town presents a tidier and less unfinished appearance than either Tomsk or Irkoutsk. I narrowly escaped being roughly handled when walking in the streets of the lower town, when, all unconsciously, I threw away the lighted end of a cigarette, a proceeding which instantly surrounded me with half a dozen infuriated inhabitants. It took Sourikoff all his time to appease them, and assure them that I was ignorant of the ways of the place, and a stranger to Siberian customs and manners, though, as I assured him, I had frequently done the same thing in other towns, and no notice had been taken. As, however, Tobolsk has been totally destroyed by fire no less than thirteen times, one can scarcely wonder at the anxiety shown by the inhabitants.

The shops were good. Though it was past nine o'clock when we returned to the lower town from visiting the public gardens and Yermak's monument, most of them were open, and the streets well

lit and crowded with people. Perhaps one of the most curious sights in Tobolsk is the "Kamaoulie Koloko," or, translated literally, "Bell with the ear torn off." Though so late, we managed to get a sight of this, which is kept in a kind of shed close to the archbishop's palace, and of which a brief account may not be without interest to the reader.

Russia, during part of the fourteenth century, was governed by the Czar Boris Godorinoff, who by the way had no right whatsoever to the crown. The line which had then reigned for nearly one hundred and fifty years, a long time in those days, was represented by one Prince Dimitri, a boy of twelve years old, but on the death of Dimitri's father in 1593, Boris raised a revolt, with the result that he was proclaimed Czar, and the boy Dimitri deposed from his rightful position. The seat of government was then at Boglitch, near the site whereon now stands the city of Nijni Novgorod, and to this place Dimitri was sent, so as to be under the immediate supervision of the peasant king. The latter, seeing an evident movement in favour of Dimitri, feared that if allowed to live, the youthful pretender might one day prove troublesome, and determined to have him assassi-

nated. While crossing the market-place, therefore, the boy was seized by some soldiers and stabbed in broad daylight, while the Czar contemplated the scene from the windows of the palace, to see the effect it might have on the population, who, however, evinced not the slightest disposition to protect the young prince or avenge his murder. Only one dissentient tongue was heard, and that an iron one. A priest happening to see the crime from the cathedral belfry, and being a partisan of the Dimitri line, commenced to toll the great bell for the repose of the young prince's soul, a bell which had always been regarded as sacred, and was only rung on the occasion of the assembling of the council or the coronation or death of a Czar. Infuriated at the priest's interference, Boris gave orders that he should at once be tortured and executed. Nor was this enough. The bell itself should suffer, and as soon as the ringer had expiated his offence, and lay a mangled corpse on the open market-place, the bell was unhung, carried down from the belfry, and placed beside the body of its ringer. It was then beaten with clubs and sticks by the entire populace, Boris at their head!

But the quaintest part of the story is to come.

Siberian exiles in those days were as a rule tortured before setting out for their place of imprisonment. The punishments inflicted were more or less severe, according to the nature of their crime, but all, without distinction, had their nostrils torn off with red-hot pincers. This was the distinguishing mark of the exile. The public flogging over, Boris decided that the offending bell should be placed on a cart and exiled to Tobolsk, where it has remained ever since. There was one difficulty, though, the bell had no nostrils. But the czar was a man of infinite resource, and, not without a certain grim humour, so had one of the *hangers* removed instead! The "Kamaoulie Koloko" is nearly all of silver, and has a deep, beautiful tone. The Tobolskians are exceedingly proud of their trophy. One sees bells everywhere; as signs over the inn doors, as toys, work-boxes, handles of walking-sticks, cigarette-cases, even sleeve-links are made in imitation of the famous "iron exile of Boglitch." It is as celebrated in its way as the Tun of Heidelberg or Lion of Lucerne.

Though a rising place as far as art and commerce is concerned, Tobolsk is very unhealthy, and is surrounded with vast stagnant marshes,

fruitful sources of malaria and fever. There is no spring, and the summer is hot, dull, and rainy, the sun at this season of the year being seldom seen for more than two days together. Scarlet fever and diphtheria are seldom absent, and in the prison, which is built to accommodate three thousand, but is often half as full again, there are occasionally severe epidemics of small-pox and typhus. Cholera is, however, unknown. The winter is perhaps the healthiest season, but even then, when in most parts of Siberia the sun is shining in a cloudless sky, Tobolsk is wreathed in damp mists from the fever swamps surrounding it. It is hard to imagine a more melancholy and depressing place than it must be in the summer months, and prisoners say they would rather be sent to Nertchinsk for ten years, than have to spend two at Tobolsk, although it is so much nearer home and European Russia. A curious discovery was made here in 1862 by the superintendent of police. Some excavations were being made by some workmen in the lower town, when they came upon a number of large subterranean passages running in all directions and obstructed every fifty yards or so by massive iron gates. News of this was at once telegraphed to

Petersburg, when, to the surprise of the inhabitants, a message came back, ordering that the places excavated should be closed up at once. As the order came direct from the czar, there was nothing to be said, and the existence of the tunnels, or how they ever came there, remains a mystery to the present day. The passages are said to exist only in the lower town. There are none under the hills where the government buildings are situated, which inclines some to the belief that they were built by some former czar, to be used in case of a revolt. Still it must be rather unpleasant for the good people of Tobolsk to live over a possible dynamite mine!

The voyage from Tobolsk to Tiumen was pleasant enough. Narrowed to a width of scarcely two hundred yards, the blue river meanders lazily through green fields, past pretty villages, neatly built and prosperous-looking, while the ruddy, happy-looking peasantry at work in the riverside meadows were a contrast to the dirty, sullen-looking population further east. A few hours before reaching Tiumen, however, all vegetation disappeared as if by magic, and we entered a sterile, sandy desert. "What a paradise for sports-

men!" said Sourikoff as we watched, from the deck of the steamer, the flocks of geese and duck and other wild fowl, wheeling backwards and forwards over the arid plain. The sky was black with them.

About midday on the 28th of September, a glittering speck appeared on the horizon, which presently developed into a confused mass of stone and wooden buildings, spires and golden domes. Two hours later we had moored alongside the busy quay and crowded wharves of Tiumen, realizing to the full that our journey was now practically over, for there within one hundred yards of us was the railway-station and just beyond it the luxurious-looking Pullman car, which was to bear us to Ekaterinburg and thence over the Oural Mountains to Perm. The whistling and puffing of the locomotive made one feel almost at home again. We forgot, in the excitement of the moment, that we were still in Asia, and many a weary mile from Old England!

The line from Tiumen to Ekaterinburg has only been built two years, and belongs to a private company. The cars are all open to each other, on the American principle, the second class being every bit as good as the first class on the Midland or Great Northern

Railway in England, and the fares absurdly low. That from Tiumen to Perm, a distance of nearly five hundred miles, is only twenty-eight roubles, first-class (under 3*l.* sterling), and I can safely say that I have never in any country travelled so luxuriously. The stations are of stone, that at Tiumen being built in the centre of a large and beautifully kept garden. It reminded one of a railway-station in a German Spa, so neat and beautifully kept were the gravel-paths and flower-beds, the fountains and iron seats under the lime-trees. As for the refreshment-room, it was equal to any in France, and far better than any I have ever seen in England. Marble floors, tables spread with snowy cloths and glittering with plate and china, neat, white-aproned waiters, and a pretty barmaid presiding over the huge sideboard, with its tempting array of caviare, pickled salmon, *patés de foie gras*, and forests of champagne and liqueur bottles, was a strange scene for Asia. It was certainly one of the most agreeable disappointments of our voyage, and after a capital dinner *à la carte*, washed down by an excellent bottle of Medoc, coffee, and kummell, we came to the conclusion that, however behindhand they may be in other matters, the Russians

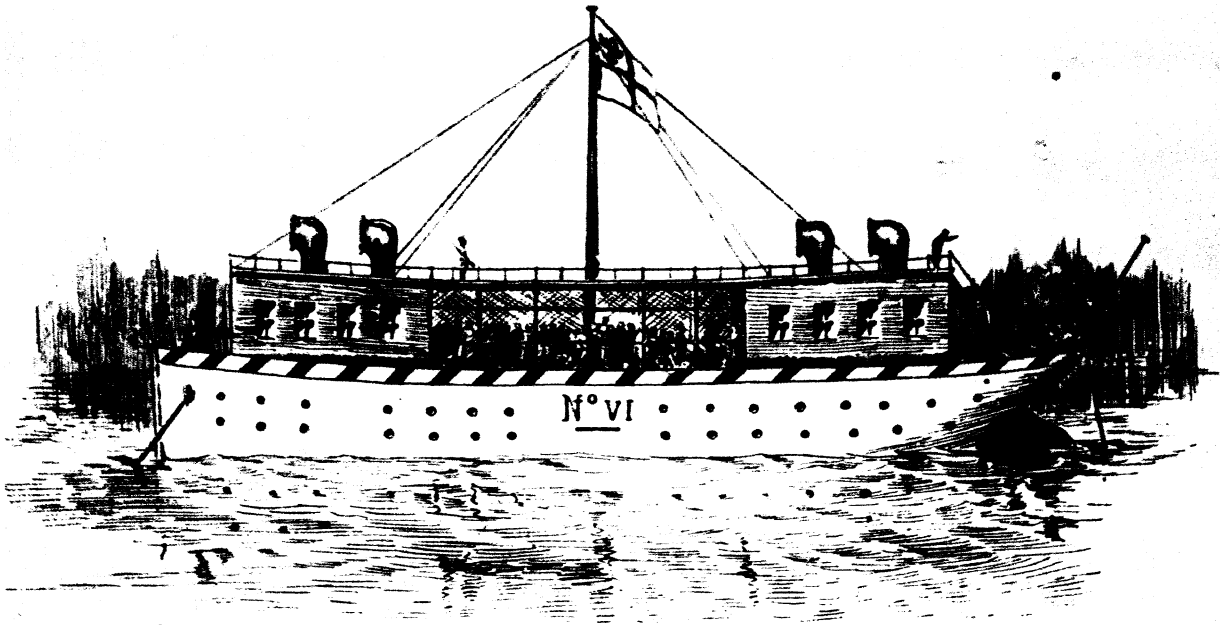
certainly do understand the art of railway travelling. The train was not leaving till 9 p.m., which gave us time for a stroll round the town. Cab fares in these parts are not ruinous. The distance from the railway-station to the town (about three miles) costing us under one shilling English money.

Tiumen is a bare, unfinished-looking place, with a population of thirty thousand, and is situated on the banks of the river Toura, a smaller branch of the Irtish. In the centre of the town is a plain, a dusty waste in summer and muddy swamp in winter, about three miles square. This is surrounded on three sides by wooden and brick buildings. In the centre is a cluster of rough wooden sheds and canvas booths, which is dignified by the name of "Bazaar," where vodka, provisions of all sorts, clothes, and agricultural implements are sold. Hard by, a circular building, built of rough planks, and covered with gaudy posters representing impossible men performing still more impossible feats, was pointed out to us with evident pride by an inhabitant, as the circus. "There would be a performance that night," said our new acquaintance, who spoke a few words of French. "Why did we not stay for it and go on the

next day? and he would show us round Tiumen after dark." But we declined the offer with thanks. He was a dirty, rough-looking fellow in Moujik kaftan and high boots, and did not inspire confidence. "Then perhaps your excellencies would like to visit a prison barge. One arrived this morning, and is empty," was the next suggestion.

We accepted this offer, and accompanied our friend, when the mystery was solved. He was a Polish exile, who, having done his time at Kara, had been permitted to return to Tiumen, for the remainder of his life. Here he managed to scrape up a living by doing odd jobs as porter, droshki-driver, and what not. He had seen better days, he told us, and knew Paris and London well, having once been employed as waiter in an Italian restaurant in the latter city, and had he kept away from Petersburg and politics, would now be living an honest and comfortable life. How many poor wretches in Siberia could, I wonder, say the same thing!

Most of the convict barges are of the same size, while all are on the same principle. The one we visited, *The Irtish*, was about two hundred and fifty feet in length, by forty in width, the upper deck being supported by two large deck-houses,



A PRISON BARGE ON THE OBI RIVER.

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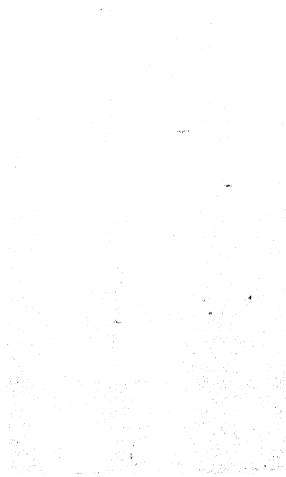

one of which formed a hospital and dispensary, the other quarters for the officers of the convoy, and exiles belonging to the noble or privileged class. No objection was shown by the sentry to our going on board. Indeed we were not even asked for our passports.

I was certainly agreeably surprised. The cells were sweet and clean, though, I must add, they had not been occupied for more than a month, the vessel having been towed back empty from Tomsk in preparation for her next cargo in the spring. "You should visit one of these ships on her arrival at Tomsk," said our guide, with a sinister smile. "I do not think then you would be quite so impressed with the cleanliness and comfort. The voyage is seldom made without at least five per cent. dying of typhus, and who can wonder? Human beings were never intended to be herded together like swine."

The large iron cage on deck amidships, in which the convicts are allowed to take exercise, certainly did give one rather the idea of a menagerie, and more fitted for the reception of monkeys than human beings; and considering that its dimensions were only seventy-five feet long by forty wide,

and that these prison ships carry eight hundred a trip, certainly seemed rather wanting in its arrangements for fresh air. Companion-ladders led down from this into the sleeping-quarters, of which there were three, ranging in length from forty to seventy feet, with a uniform width of forty feet, and a height of about seven. One of these cabins is given up for the accommodation of women and children, the others occupied by the men. Through the centre of each runs longitudinally two tiers of double sleeping-platforms, upon which the prisoners lie athwart-ships in four closely packed rows, with their heads together over the line of the keel. These sleeping-platforms are made of wooden boards. There are not even wooden pillows, but prisoners are not debarred from making use of their great-coats for that purpose, or any linen bags or cloths they may have about them. Indeed, all the prisoners we met seemed to carry exactly what they liked, from a tin saucepan to a gingham umbrella.

We got rid of our guide with some difficulty, for he was anxious that we should visit the prison under his auspices. This we thought wise to decline, not relishing the idea of being "detained on suspicion,"

as we probably should have been, by the Tiumen authorities, if seen lurking round the prison gates in the society of a "discharged Katorgi." A couple of roubles, however, consoled him, and we left him standing in the middle of the muddy road, making deep obeisances and calling down numberless blessings on the heads of the "Ingliski gospodin." Passing the same spot two hours later, we found him flat on his back by the roadside, dead drunk, with two empty vodka bottles beside him!

Tiumen must be a cheap place to live in, judging from the price of provisions and grain. Beef and mutton are as cheap again as in most parts of England, while wheat, which is always cheap, became in 1887 a veritable drug in the market, and was selling at Semipalatinsk, in Southern Siberia, for eight kopeks a pood. One speculator from that city went to the expense of exporting a quantity to Vernoe, four hundred miles off, on the borders of China, but then only managed to get twenty-five kopeks a pood, the harvests having been equally good. He had only got rid of about half, when the earthquake occurred, which the reader may recollect destroyed the whole city, and more than half the population in September, 1887.

Many people are under the impression that the Oural Mountains are of great altitude, and the scenery very grand. Though the length of the chain is something over one thousand seven hundred miles, its highest peak does not attain to more than six thousand feet, and at the point where the line crosses them, barely two thousand feet above sea-level. No part of the Ourals is permanently covered with snow. Hard by the town of Ekateniburg, by the side of the Great Post-Road to Siberia, is a large stone pillar, on one side of which is carved the word "Europe," upon the other "Asia," and this marks the boundary between the two quarters of the globe. There is probably no spot in the whole breadth and length of Siberia more full of painful associations than this, for no less than eighteen hundred thousand exiles have passed it since 1878, more than half a million men, women, and children since the beginning of the present century. The base of the pillar is covered with inscriptions, letters rudely carved by those who have here looked their last on their native land. It is the custom to make a halt and allow the exiles to bid good-bye, many of them for ever, to Europe. Travellers no longer

pass the spot, now that the railway has obviated the long, lonely drive from Perm to Tiumen. The frontier on the line is marked by three stations, at intervals of ten miles or so, "Asia, Oural, and Europe." At ten o'clock on the morning of the 29th of September, we passed *by rail* from one quarter of the globe into another, and reached at mid-day the town of Ekaterinburg.

We here bade adieu, with much regret, to the Sourikoffs, who were proceeding direct to Perm, and took up our quarters at the comfortable *Amerikanske Gostinza*, or American Hotel, so called, perhaps, because but two Americans have ever set foot in the place. It was evident that we had left Asia. The broad, stone-paved streets and boulevards, the handsome hotels, private houses enclosed in large well-kept gardens, and last, but not least, the well-dressed men and women in the streets, were signs that we had done with sombre, sad Siberia for good and all. Ekaterinburg was the first really civilized place we had seen since leaving Shanghai, it seemed ages ago, and here for the first time since leaving Pekin we enjoyed the unwonted luxuries of a real bath, and a clean bed with sheets and pillow-cases.

The neighbourhood of Ekaterinburg, which has a population of twenty-five thousand inhabitants, is rich in minerals and precious stones. Among the former iron preponderates; and there are many Englishmen settled here working it. It seemed strange to hear one's own tongue again spoken in the streets and hotels, and to read in many cases the names of the latter and of shopkeepers written in French over their doors. The jewellers were almost as wearying and importunate as the Cinghalese sapphire-sellers at Colombo. We had scarcely been in our room at the hotel half an hour before we were assailed by a crowd of clamouring dealers, who would not be denied; but insisted, though we were performing our ablutions in a state of nudity, in laying out their wares on the floor, till the drugget was covered with a glittering mass of gems, among which were beryls, topaz, aquamarines, and chrysolites. Amongst them were also one or two Alexandrites, the recently discovered stone which shows two colours, crimson and green, the former by night, and the latter by day. It derives its name from the Emperor Alexander, and has also been found in Ceylon of late years. The stones were of moderate prices, but our funds

were too low to permit of our making any investments, perhaps luckily for ourselves, for here, as in Colombo, there are many worthless imitations.

We left Ekaterinburg on the afternoon of the 30th of September for Perm, whence we were to take the steamer down the Kama and Volga rivers to Nijni Novgorod. Though the railway between the two cities is worked by a different company to that we had come by from Tiumen, we found the comfort in every respect as great as on the other line. Each car had its lavatory, heating apparatus, and comfortable sleeping fauteuils. At every third or fourth station we found an excellent buffet, open throughout the night. At one of them, Nijni Tagilsk, where we stopped to dine, the dining-room of the station would not have disgraced a first-class hotel in Paris or London. Down the centre of the brilliantly lighted room ran a long table, covered with snowy table-cloth, and glittering with silver plate and glass. The waiters were all in evening dress, with spotless shirt fronts and white ties, and as they served one with an excellent dinner of four courses and dessert, it was difficult indeed to realize that one was yet but a few miles out of Asia. It was the same everywhere. There

are twenty odd stations between Ekaterinburg and Perm, at every one of which was laid out, no matter what hour of the day or night, a cold, if not hot, meal, or towards the chilly morning hours steaming bowls of *café-au-lait* or tea, with dainty rolls and tiny glasses of vodka and cognac to cheer the inner man. We passed Neviansk towards sunset, a picturesque village embowered in pine forest, and surrounded by three large lakes, about two hours out of Ekaterinburg. Neviansk is used as a summer resort and watering-place by the inhabitants of the city, when, during June and July the heat and dust become unbearable.

On the 1st of October, towards 6 a.m., we woke and looked out of the frost-dimmed windows, to find ourselves in a new world. Wooden rails and enclosures had given way to thick-set hedges and small fields, plank huts to stone houses with corrugated iron roofs, a mineral, in this district, as cheap as pine or fir. The pine and birch forests had entirely disappeared. We were now passing large plains of cultivated land, neat farm buildings surrounded by gardens and orchards, and occasionally a village or town, approached by a poplar-lined road, winding through the deserted

fields. The landscape between Nijni Tagilsk and Perm might well be mistaken for that lying between Boulogne and Amiens on the Chemin de Fer du Nord.

The Oural trains are as punctual as they are comfortable, and we reached Perm to the minute at the appointed time, 9 a.m. The scene at the station was all confusion. The boat was only advertised to leave at noon, and the scurry and excitement to get on board seemed very unnecessary. We here had to encounter an unexpected difficulty. Men were rushing about the platform with pink and yellow handbills, each advertising a steamer bound for Nijni Novgorod, both boats to leave at the same hour—noon. The question was which to go by, for both, outwardly, looked exactly the same, though flying different company flags. There was no one to help us, and my small stock of Russian was absolutely useless in the uproar. In vain I button-holed policemen, railway porters, soldiers—in vain gesticulated and shouted, "Loutchshi parohode?" (Best boat?) It was no use, so we determined to do as we had always done in the event of uncertainty, toss up. The steamer *Perm* was the one our coin settled on,

and, fortunately for us, the right one. The other boat, the *Nijni Novgorod*, was a wretched tub, and arrived at its destination only five days after us, when we were already comfortably settled in Moscow.

Perm is not a prepossessing city, though the day we saw it was perhaps not a favourable one. A dense fog shrouded everything in damp white mist, through which loomed the dome of the cathedral, and great, gaunt warehouses lining the banks of the river. A steady drizzle, which had commenced on our arrival and continued ever since with steady persistency, extinguished all our hopes of visiting the town, and we were glad to take refuge out of the cold and fog in the brilliantly lighted though somewhat stuffy saloon of the steamer, where several of the passengers (of which there were about a hundred) had already settled down to a good square meal of stchi (cabbage soup), sterlet, and beefsteak. A somewhat substantial menu for nine in the morning!

It was a relief to find that, by paying a few roubles extra, we could secure a cabin to ourselves, and one considerably roomier than those generally met with in ocean-going ships.

At mid-day, punctual to the minute, the bell was rung, the whistle sounded, and in less than ten minutes the city of Perm was lost in a shroud of mist, and we were steadily ploughing our way through the broad yellow stream to the last stage of our homeward journey, Nijni Novgorod.

CHAPTER XII.

PERM TO CALAIS.

THE *Perm* was a large and comfortable vessel, replete with every modern appliance, even to a piano and electric bells, and I doubt whether one would have found a better cuisine on a Cunarder or White Star Liner. But, despite her gorgeous fittings, she was filthily dirty, and her cabins infested with vermin, so much so, that sleep at night was out of the question. This was probably due to the large number of deck passengers she carried, among them a large number of Kirghiz Tartars, fine, well-built fellows, and a striking contrast to their squat, stumpy brothers in Mongolia. Many wore the native dress: a kind of woollen night-cap, which can be pulled down over the ears and neck in cold weather, and loose baggy trousers, stuffed into short butcher-boots. A loose coat worn over the shirt, open at the neck and wide at the sleeves, with a belt round the waist, completed the costume. In winter a short pelisse

of sheep's wool (called Poloushouba), is also worn, the wool inwards. The Kirghiz Tartars are Mahometans, and their grave, reserved demeanour was a strange contrast to the buffoonery and skylarking proclivities of our merry little friends of the Gobi Desert.

The ordinary daily life of the Kirghiz, however, differs but little from that of the latter. The tents of the former are exactly the same shape, and of the same material, as those we saw in Mongolia. The Kirghiz, too, is quite as gluttonous and filthy in his habits as the Mongolian Tartar, and, unlike most Mahometans, is given to getting drunk on the sly. In one point only do they differ: the zealous and watchful eye that a Kirghiz keeps upon his womankind would be ridiculed by the happy-go-lucky, trusting Mongol, and yet I fancy, with all his care, that the wife, or wives, of the former are really not a whit more virtuous than the ladies of Mongolia, for all their yashmaks and assumed modesty.

We experienced cold and rainy weather all the way to Kazan, which was reached on the 3rd of October.

The scenery of the Kama and Volga rivers differs

little from that of the Obi, and though the latter would be called a fine river in Europe, it appeared dwarfed, in our eyes, into insignificance after the huge lake-like Yenisei and Obi. The navigation of the Volga is in parts extremely dangerous, but the risk small, for dangerous channels are well marked with buoys, and after dark by barges, on board of which huge bonfires are kept blazing all night. On clear nights this had a pretty effect, and the avenues of fire reflected in the dark water, the green and red lights of passing steamers, towing huge, shadowy lighters up or down stream, the dark, starlit sky, and voices of distant boatmen, as they trolled out some river-song, was impressive and picturesque. But the nights were getting very cold, and we did not spend much of our time on deck, preferring even the stuffy saloon, with its smoky atmosphere and smell of stale food, to the cutting north-easter outside.

We stayed at Kazan six hours. This city, which may be called the true boundary between European and Asiatic Russia, is about seven versts from the landing-stage, with which there is communication by tramway. As a town, Kazan is unique. The ancient Tartar capital, it has outwardly kept up

many of its oriental customs and all its Eastern appearance. The veiled faces of the women, the fierce, swarthy Tartars in wild, barbaric costume, bristling with daggers and cartridge-belts, the mosques, minarets, and oriental-looking houses, mingling in strange incongruity with the modern stone houses of the Russian population, *à la mode de Paris*, four stories high, with balconies, *porte cochères*, and carved façades, made one almost wonder whether the long journey from China had not turned one's head and indelibly mixed Europe and Asia in our minds, even to the objects around us. But the streets of Kazan are, notwithstanding their varied architecture, regular, well-built, and gas-lit. There is not much trade, the exports being principally hides, tallow, and iron. Costly weapons are made by the Tartars, swords, pistols, and scimitars, with hilts and barrels inlaid with gold and silver.

The best society in Kazan is equal to that of Moscow or Petersburg, some Russian families having settled here since the days of the expulsion of the Tartar dynasty. A charming person, Madame ——, who was proceeding to Vienna on a visit to her sister, joined us here. She had

been married four years, and had during that time only once left her husband's château in the environs of Kazan.

Madame —— was a native of Moscow, spoke French like a Parisian, and sang like an angel. From this point to Nijni Novgorod was pleasant enough, for we managed, by dint of bribery, to get the piano removed from the crowded saloon to a smaller cabin on the lower deck, and had a couple of pleasant musical soirées together, the quartette consisting of our three selves and the captain, who sang Volga boat-songs in a sweet tenor voice, and was, though Siberian, a charming and well-educated man. Madame ——, though she had been banished for so long from the civilized world, was a delightful companion. Her knowledge of England and English literature was, however, somewhat limited. I asked her, on one occasion, if she liked English authors as well as French. "No," she replied, "I can't say I do. There is such a sameness about English writing; though it is true, I have only read two English books." On asking her which, she replied, "'The London Journal' and 'Bow Bells'!" No wonder she had not the highest opinion of British authorship!

I was quite sorry, when we reached Nijni Novgorod, to bid the little lady adieu. One is not often blessed with such a pleasant travelling companion in civilized regions, much less in these unfrequented byways of Europe. Nor did she seem the least dismayed at the long journey before her alone and unprotected; but Russian women are the best travellers in the world.

We passed, just before reaching Nijni Novgorod, a large white paddle-steamer, built on the American principle, bound for Astrakhan, on the Caspian. She was going full seventeen knots an hour, and churning up the muddy water in a way that made the *Perm* roll uncomfortably till she was far astern of us. We also passed at least fifty barges between Kazan and Nijni, laden with petroleum, from the Baku oil-wells on the Caspian.

The Great Fair [4] was just over at Nijni Novgorod, and we had no difficulty in getting rooms at the Hôtel de la Poste, an excellent inn, which but ten days before had been crammed from basement to attic with tourists from Moscow and Petersburg.

[4] The transactions at the fair of Nijni Novgorod are said to amount yearly to over four millions sterling.

The city stands on a high hill, at the confluence of the Volga and Oka rivers, and in fair time presents a strange and unique spectacle. The fair is held on the left-hand bank of the Oka river, being connected with the town by a long floating bridge, but at this season the river itself is so covered with boats and barges, anchored for the sale of goods, as to look like dry land.

"The scene from the town heights opposite," says an eye-witness, "is at the time of the fair indescribable." There, embraced within the compass of a glance, is the great fair of Nijni Novgorod. A huge flat sandy plain, flanked by two great rivers, is covered over with houses of different colours, mostly red and yellow, made of brick, wood, and matting; millions of this world's richest merchandise, stored or strewn in every direction; churches, mosques, and theatres, rising in their midst, three hundred thousand human beings more or less engaged in buying, selling, trafficking, pushing, jolting, hurrying in every direction; barges warped along the quays of two rivers, still busily engaged in unloading their exhaustless cargoes. The river at your base is the Oka, and running at right angles to it, at the point exactly opposite to where

you are, the still mightier Volga mixes its waters with it. On reaching the quays below a low wooden bridge, very much like that which spans the Rhine at Mayence, crosses the Oka at a point about a verst distant from its embouchure. This is the only means of communication, except by water, between the town and the fair. Behold crowds on foot, in carriages, and on horseback; droves of bewildered cattle driven by bearded, wild-looking men in gaudy coloured barbaric dress, carts heavily laden with jars, casks, sacks, boxes, and unwieldy lengths of timber; grave-looking orientals with flowing robes and Astrakhan hats, alone imperturbable in the midst of the thronging crowd; the din, the trampling, the confusion, all vastly aggravated by the mounted Cossacks, who, placed at intervals along the line on their restive little horses to keep order, add greatly to the general confusion. Add to all this that after it has been raining all day—and it often does rain at Nijni Novgorod—the roads are not ankle deep nor knee deep, but hip and thigh deep in slush and mud, and a picture of this strange city during fair time is before you.

"I was struck," says the same writer, "with the

number of 'Traktirs' or eating-houses of the poorer sort. It is no light matter to supply the daily wants of two to three hundred thousand people. Formerly this was left to private enterprise, but whilst the caterers grew rich, the people suffered. Not a year passed without an epidemic of some sort breaking out among the throng which attended the fair. This was owing partly to the food, which was notoriously bad, and partly to the air, which in the absence of drainage or any sanitary arrangements was pestilential. The Russian Government grappled boldly with this double evil. To meet the danger of unwholesome food, they established in different parts of the fair cheap eating-houses, where for the sum of eight kopeks (about twopence three farthings) the poorer classes could obtain a substantial meal, consisting of 'Shtchi' or cabbage soup, black bread *ad libitum*, and a favourite porridge called 'Kasche.' They can also obtain for three kopeks (about a penny) enough tea to give them half a dozen cups of that national beverage and three pieces of sugar. Since these precautions have been taken, no serious epidemic has broken out at the Nijni 'Yarmark.'

"Although one can scarcely mention an article great or small, European or Asiatic, that may not be purchased at Nijni Novgorod during the months of August and September, the staple commerce is in tea, sugar, iron, cotton, silk, and furs of all kinds. Most of the tea sold at Nijni is black tea, yellow and white teas are also sold, but in retail, and an enormous quantity of brick tea is also annually imported. This is called 'Kirpitchni' and is largely drunk by the Kalmuks and Kirghiz. The duty on Canton tea is heavier than that on Kiakhta or 'overland' tea by a considerable amount. Probably if it were not for the popular prejudice that sea-transported tea loses its flavour, the amount of overland tea would be considerably less than it is. With reference to this opinion the following is the current doctrine held by the most experienced Russian merchants on the subject. They hold not exactly that the sea voyage injures the tea, but that the preparation of the tea for the voyage, viz., the extra drying and exposure to the air which it has to undergo in order that it may not be deteriorated by the damp atmosphere, does undoubtedly affect its flavour, so that indirectly it comes to the same thing. "The tea depôt," says

Mr. ——, "is certainly the most picturesque part of the fair; it would be still more so if the Chinaman with his pigtail could be seen. But there are no Chinamen at Nijni; the tea and the Chinamen part company at Maimachin, near Kiakhta, and from that point the trade is entirely in the hands of Russians."

The fur quarter is perhaps the next most interesting part of the fair, long galleries of booths, where miles of bear skins, wolf skins, fox skins, beaver skins, and even sheep skins hang up on either side of your passage. The more valuable skins and furs are carefully packed away in drawers and not exposed to the vulgar gaze. Among these are the beautiful blue and silver fox and beaver. The silver fox so called because its coat is sprinkled with white silvery hairs, is, next the beaver and sable, the most costly fur that can be bought. A single perfect belly of the silver fox will fetch (at Nijni) as much as one hundred roubles. Among the skins sold for warmth and not show, that of the reindeer is perhaps the most popular. They are brought mostly from the northern districts of Vologda and Archangel, and are of three degrees of merit and value. The "Pijick," or skin of the animal at one month old, is the best; that of the

"Oleni," above nine months old, is the least valuable.

Two other fairs are held at Nijni Novgorod, but they are small and uninteresting. The one held in the month of January, on the ice, at the mouth of the Oka river, is devoted to the selling and buying of wooden wares, such as toys and boxes. Great numbers come in on this occasion from the neighbouring villages, and it is looked upon by the peasants more as an occasion of feasting and merry-making, than one of business. In 1864 the ice on which the booths and "Traktirs" were constructed, gave way, and a number of men, women, and children, and horses were drowned. The other fair is held on the 6th of July, and is exclusively for the sale of horses.

In May, the Volga frequently overflows its banks to a depth of several feet, and covers the site of the fair, in anticipation of which the lower storeys of the warehouses and buildings are cleared, and to cleanse them before July is one of the first things to be done by the owners. This may account for a good deal of the sickness that exists in a very hot summer or early autumn. The fine for smoking in the streets, during fair time, is twenty-five

roubles. This is rigidly enforced, and a second offence means imprisonment without the option. The arrangements for protection against fire are excellent. Not only on land, but on the river also, powerful fire-engines are stationed, and numerous little hand-engines are posted at the most inflammatory quarters. In case of fire, within three minutes of the alarm-bell, a dozen large engines could be on the spot at any part of the fair, and being surrounded by the Volga and Oka rivers, there is no lack of water.

The town of Nijni itself is well built, and its broad, steep streets paved with asphalte in many places. They are lit by gas, and some of the principal thoroughfares by electric light. Altogether, we were well pleased with the city, the first we had yet seen without a single wooden building to mar the beauty of stone buildings, that would not have disgraced London or Paris, and yet forty years ago there were scarcely a dozen stone houses in the place!

Leaving Nijni Novgorod on the evening of the 5th October, the following morning saw us in Moscow, and comfortably installed at that luxurious but expensive hotel, the "Slavenski Bazar," an establishment almost equal in comfort to the

Hôtel Bristol in Paris, but about twice as dear in its charges. The restaurant is, perhaps, one of the finest in the world. In the centre of the latter is a large round tank covered with white water-lilies, and fringed by reeds and riverside flowers, in which swim lazily to and fro huge sturgeon and sterlet, brought daily from the Volga, and which are chosen and picked out by divers with a small net a couple of hours before they are eaten, thus ensuring perfect freshness.

The plan or general panorama of Moscow is not unlike that of Paris, the city having its nucleus in the celebrated "Kremlin," which I was somewhat disappointed in, perhaps because it had so often been thrust down one's throat as a beautiful sight. The word "Kremlin" is derived from the Tartar language, in which it means "fortress," every town of importance in Russia having its "Kremlin," great or small. The walls of the Moscow Kremlin are about seven thousand three hundred feet in circumference, and enclose the Imperial palace, arsenal, and treasury, besides three cathedrals, a monastery, a convent, and the tower of Ivan the Great, which latter is about three hundred feet in height, and commands, on a clear day, one of the finest views

in the world. At the foot of the tower stands the "Tsar Kolokol," or "king of bells," which weighs nearly two hundred tons, stands twenty-six feet high, and has a circumference of sixty-eight feet. This bell dates back as far as the year 1674, when it was suspended from a wooden beam at the foot of the tower, from which during a fire it fell in 1706. Its fragments lay on the ground until the reign of the Empress Anne, by whose orders it was again recast in 1733. By the falling of some heavy rafters during another fire, in 1737, or, according to some accounts, owing to an imperfection in the casting caused by jewels and other treasures having been thrown into the liquid metal by the ladies of Moscow, a piece in the side was knocked out; and the bell remained buried till the year 1836, when it was placed on its present pedestal by order of Nicholas I. Moscow is essentially a city of bells and churches. Among the former are some of the sweetest toned ones I have ever heard. This is due in a great measure to the large amount of gold and silver used in the alloy. Morning, noon, and night the bells of Moscow are never silent. Wake up at four in the morning, and you will hear at least a dozen churches (there are over four

hundred) tolling for some religious service, or the repose of a soul.

There are three cathedrals within the Kremlin: the Annunciation, where the Czars are baptized and married; the Assumption, where they are crowned; and the Archangel Michael, where they are interred. The latter is, perhaps, though not the richest, the most curious, for it contains, ranged round the walls, the coffins of all the Czars reigning between 1333 and 1696. Entering suddenly from the sunshine, it was some time before we discovered that we were surrounded by some forty coffins, each covered with a dark crimson velvet pall, bearing a gold embroidered cross. Near the centre altar stood the bier of little Prince Dimitri, murdered by order of the Czar Boris. Part of the face, which looks of the consistency of dark leather, is exposed, and this is kissed daily by many thousands of the faithful. A service was going on, at one of the smaller chapels, the bright gleam of light around the Ikonostase and white and gold vestments throwing the rest of the building into deeper gloom, while the melancholy dirge which the priests were droning out for the repose of some dead monarch, heightened the effect of the gloomy scene.

The richest church in Moscow, if not the handsomest, is the Cathedral of the Assumption, which dates from A.D. 1479. This cathedral was pillaged by the French in 1812. It still contains, notwithstanding, treasure and relics of fabulous wealth. Some of the pictures are literally covered with diamonds and other precious stones; one, a picture of the Holy Virgin, having attached to it jewels worth thirty million roubles. Among the relics is one of the nails used at the crucifixion, and a portion of the garment worn by our Saviour.

The Kremlin may be described as a town within a city, and a very quiet dull town, for there is but little life or movement in its cobbled grass-grown streets. To a student of architecture, however, it must be interesting, for the Byzantine, Gothic, Arab, and even Chinese styles are there mixed in glorious confusion. The palace, though it contains magnificent reception-rooms, and millions of roubles have been spent on its restoration, is an ugly, commonplace building, and detracts a good deal from the picturesque appearance of the churches and buildings around it, while the arsenal and treasury are positively hideous. Ranged along the walls of the former are the cannon taken from the

French. There are eight hundred and seventy-five pieces in all, each bearing a name upon their breech thus : " Le Valliant," " La Ravissante," "L'Eclair," &c. It was then, apparently, customary to christen cannon like ships in the present day.

On leaving or entering the Kremlin by the Spasskoi Gate, every one must uncover. The Russians are tetchy on this point, and a stranger infringing the rule would have a bad time of it. The legend runs that Napoleon I. is the only man that ever dared ride through the gate with his hat on; but that, even in his case, a gust of wind sent it flying before he was well through, much to the rage and discomfiture of " Le Petit Caporal."

The name of the latter is, strange to say, revered by all, and loved by some in the Holy City, and it is rare to hear a Russian display animosity towards France. There is rather a feeling of pity for the thousands of unhappy soldiers who perished, frozen to death, on the bleak plains around Moscow, during the retreat from that city, a disaster that gave rise to the Russian expression, " I feel as cold as a Frenchman ! " The Muscovite excels even the Parisian in politeness. No one ever dreams of entering a shop or restaurant covered, and the very

beggars in the streets salute each other with the air of nobles. On the whole I have seldom seen a city I liked more on a short acquaintance than Moscow, perhaps for the reason that it is utterly unlike any other I have ever beheld. It is fairly clean, for Russia, but although the two principal thoroughfares are asphalte-paved, the smaller streets would disgrace a third-rate country town in England, and are in summer ankle deep in dust, in winter a sea of mud and mire.

But although this city is, next to Constantinople, the earthly paradise of the sight-seer, I will not trouble the reader with our peregrinations round a city which has been so often and so graphically described. It may be heresy to say so, but I must confess that the sight which impressed me most was the poorly furnished room, with its camp-bedstead and two rough wooden chairs, in the hotel, where brave Skobeleff breathed his last, and under what deplorable circumstances!

We were not anxious to prolong our stay, for winter arrived with unpleasant suddenness, on the 10th of October. The barometer, which had at 2 p.m. been up to 70°, had sunk at 7 p.m. to only two degrees above zero, and by nine o'clock

snow was falling in thin white flakes. The next morning it was nine or ten inches deep, and gangs of men were at work in the streets flattening it down for sledge traffic.

I look back on Warsaw as the one bright spot in our journey. It will be long ere I forget the bright sunny morning that we came upon its white palaces and gardens, its squares and boulevards, after a tedious railway journey from Moscow. Apart from the cheerful look of the town and population, one felt one had reached Europe at last. The first thing that strikes one on arriving at this so-called down-trodden city is the preponderance of the female element; the second, how unusually good-looking that element is. I think one sees more pretty women in five minutes in Warsaw than in half-an-hour in any other European capital, London thrown in. An ill-dressed Warsaw woman is an anomaly. Even the lower orders seemed to know how to put their clothes on, for the Polish woman has a *cachet* of her own; has the "chic" of a Parisienne, with the beauty of a Viennese, for nearly all are tall and well-made, with good figures and graceful carriage. It is apparently the fashion among the "smart" ladies

of Warsaw to let small pieces of metal into the heels of their boots, which make a clear ringing sound as they walk, and the effect (on a pretty woman) is not unpleasing.

As Moscow follows Petersburg in fashions and customs, so does Warsaw Vienna. The Russian tongue in Warsaw is seldom heard. No longer is the sacred *ikon* seen in apartments and bedrooms. Tea is drunk in cups, *not* glasses; but coffee is the favourite beverage of all classes. We had evidently done with Russia for good, though the town swarmed with the Czar's troops in their ugly pea-soup-coloured coats and white caps. Here, unlike most Russian and Siberian towns, the soldiers are encouraged to walk about and show themselves, but I do not think I saw a dozen uniforms the whole time I was in Moscow.

Reaching Vienna the 17th of October, ten days later sees us rattling along in the eleven o'clock train from Paris for London, *viâ* Calais. A thick haze hangs over the Channel as we approach the coast. The sea is of a dirty grey, and presents a very different appearance to when we last saw it, blue and sparkling, in the Gulf of Pechili! It is with a queer but pleasant feeling of rest and relief that we

leave land at last to step on to the broad white deck of the steamer *Victoria*, at Calais.

"Would you care to do it again?" says a casual acquaintance to whom we have narrated our adventures, if such they may be called.

"Not for ten thousand pounds," says Lancaster, emphatically. And yet, as a ray of sun shines out of the mist, lighting up the white cliffs of England, bright augur of the comfort and civilization we are nearing, I cannot help thinking that to experience such a moment as this is well worth even the discomfort and privations that have attended our long, weary voyage from *Pekin to Calais by land.*

THE END

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